OPINION: SETTING THE ECONOMIC DIRECTION P.20 | FEATURES: GRACE, GRIT & GLORY P.38

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GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

How freer access and streamlined process create a dynamic economic ecosystem in Hainan

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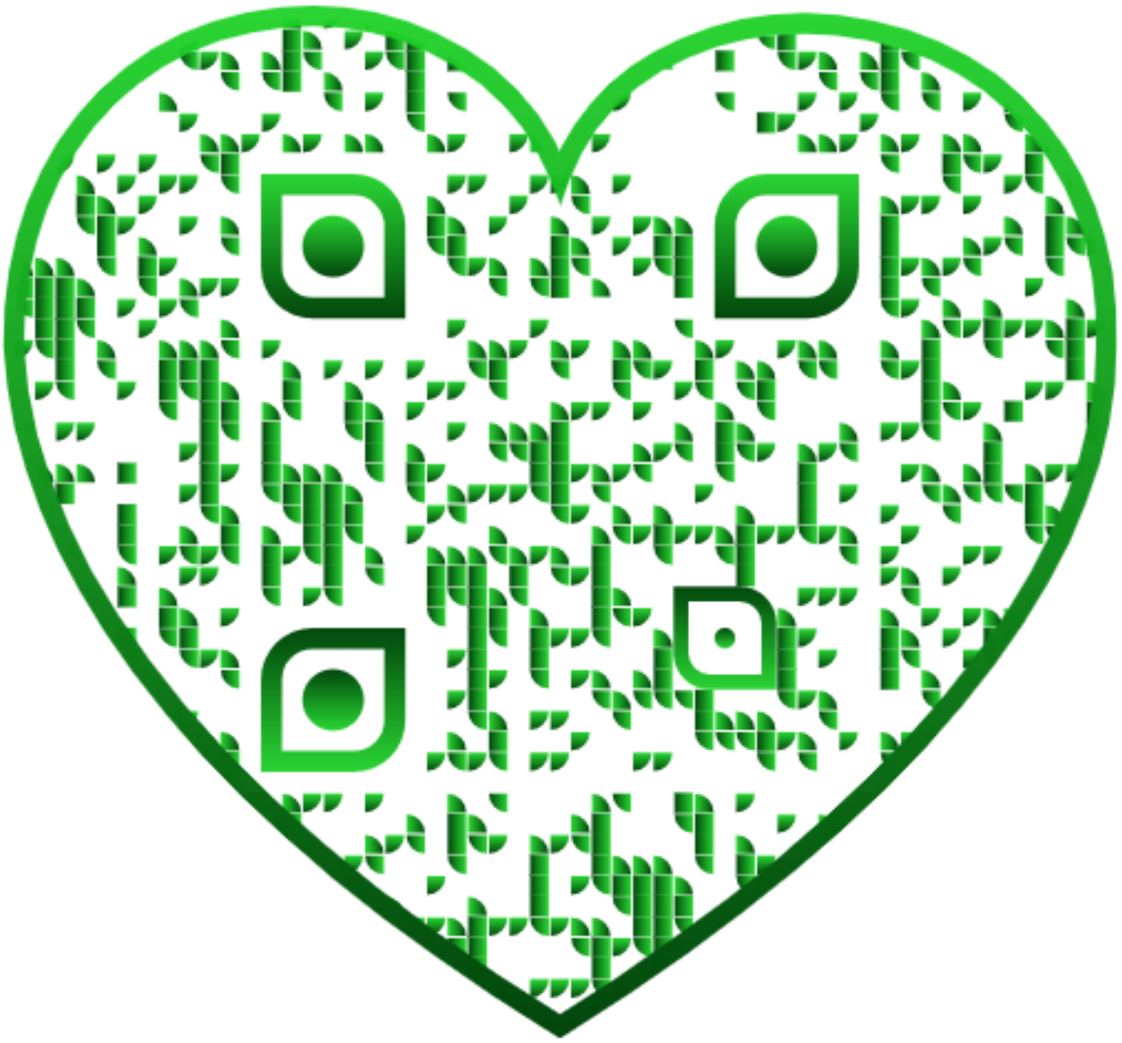

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Cover Photo: A port in Haikou, Hainan Province, on December 17 (VCG)

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First Line Open, Second Line Set

On December 18, the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP), the world's largest by area, officially launched its special customs operations.

Under these operations, the Hainan FTP will implement a special supervision model: freer access at the first line, regulated access at the second line and free flows within the island. The "first line" refers to Hainan's connection with overseas markets. "Freer access at the first line" allows overseas goods to enter the island more conveniently, with most benefiting from zero tariffs and expedited clearance. The "second line" refers to the customs boundary between Hainan and the mainland, where goods will undergo standard customs oversight to ensure fairness and prevent smuggling. The two-tiered customs system enables freer trade between Hainan and areas outside China's customs borders.

This move fully unlocks the province's policy package, featuring zero tariffs, low tax rates and streamlined procedures—for businesses, individuals and key industries—signaling a leap in China's trade and investment liberalization.

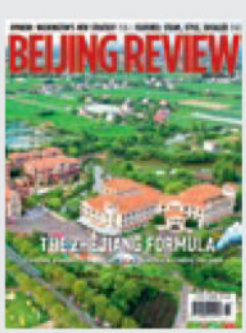
In 1988, Hainan Island was elevated from a part of Guangdong Province into both a province and China's largest special economic zone. This gave it a unique mandate to pioneer deep reform and high-level opening up.

In April 2018, the Central Government tasked Hainan with steadily developing an FTP with Chinese characteristics. The 2020 plan outlined its path: to learn from global models while reflecting a distinct Chinese approach. And it follows a clear timeline:

Establish the core policy system, focusing on trade and investment liberalization, and prepare for special customs operations by late 2025; mature the FTP's institutions, creating a new highland for the further opening up of China's economy, by 2035; and build a fully realized, high-level FTP with strong international influence by mid-century.

In today's times of transformation, marked by rising protectionism and headwinds against economic globalization, the Hainan FTP stands as a decisive commitment to high-level opening up.

More than a domestic milestone, this FTP represents a strategic shift to attract global investment and entrepreneurship. It will serve as a benchmark for facilitating the cross-border flow and optimal allocation of global resources. **BR**



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NANJING MASSACRE COMMEMORATION

A national memorial ceremony for the victims of the Nanjing Massacre is held at the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, on December 13. The 12th National Memorial Day was observed in Nanjing that same day to honor people killed by Japanese troops during the Nanjing Massacre, in the year of the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II (WWII). The Nanjing Massacre took place when Japanese troops captured the then-Chinese capital on December 13, 1937. Over the course of six weeks, they proceeded to kill approximately 300,000 Chinese civilians and unarmed soldiers in one of the most barbaric episodes of WWII.

XINHUA

Building Barriers

Staff build sand barriers in the Kumtag Desert in Aksay Kazak Autonomous County, Gansu Province, on December 13. A water conservation, ecological protection and restoration project is underway there, with sub-projects including sand fixation and afforestation.

Reducing Exams

The Ministry of Education has ordered a reduction in the frequency of routine exams and tests for primary and secondary schools to alleviate the academic burden on students, Xinhua News Agency reported on December 17.

A recent ministry circular states that written exams will not be conducted for first and second graders in primary schools. For other years of compulsory education, schools may organize one final exam per semester.

For junior high school students, one midterm exam may be arranged based on the practical needs of different subjects, according to the circular.

It also notes that examination papers should align strictly with national curriculum standards and actual teaching practices, with scientifically optimized question types and difficulty levels.

Digital Consumers

The number of digital consumers in China topped 958 million in the first half of 2025, highlighting the growing role of digital spending in the country's overall consumption, Xinhua reported on December 16.

According to a report released by the China Internet Network Information Center, China's digital consumer base accounts for 85.3 percent of the nation's Internet users.

Among them, Gen Zs—people born between 1997 and 2012—make up 27.2 percent of all digital consumers, while people aged 60 and older account for 12.2 percent. Rural users represent 26 percent of the total.

In the first half of the year, 39.1 percent of Chinese Internet users purchased smart products, including smart home devices, digital gadgets and wearable technology. About 8.2 percent bought blind boxes, intellectual property (IP)-related merchandise or anime-themed products online, as per the report.

It highlights that digital cultural and entertainment content is helping to drive integrated spending across smart hardware, culture and tourism. In the area of lifestyle services, more than 223 million consumers had used online platforms for errands, home services or maintenance as of late June.

Job Growth

China created 12.1 million urban jobs in the first 11 months of 2025, meeting its full-year target of over 12 million a month ahead of schedule, official data showed on December 16.

Over the same period, the average surveyed urban unemployment rate was 5.2 percent, better than the annual target of about 5.5 percent, according to data from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

Central to household livelihoods and social stability, employment has remained high on China's policy agenda, with authorities introducing comprehensive measures to support job growth.

Air Quality

In the first 11 months of this year, Beijing recorded its lowest average concentration of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) since monitoring began, the municipal environmental authorities reported on December 16.

From January to November, Beijing's average PM2.5 concentration dropped to 26.5 micrograms per cubic meter, a 16.7-percent year-on-year decrease.

During the period, the city enjoyed 282 days of good air quality, which was 23 days more than in the same period last year.

These improvements are attributable to the city's ongoing efforts to combat air pollution. The city has promoted the broader adoption of new-energy vehicles, implemented emissions reduction measures in construction projects, and supported the green transformation of businesses.

Additionally, its clean heating renovation project has exceeded its annual targets, and the treatment of cooking fumes has been upgraded in 1,401 catering establishments ahead of schedule.

Looking ahead, authorities say that Beijing will implement targeted measures to address pollution during the winter months, enhance precise forecasting and analysis, and ensure that air quality targets are met.

Restored Great Wall Section

Beijing's Great Wall section of Jiangjunguan, a historically strategic pass, will be opened to the public, authorities announced on December 14.

Following restoration work, emergency reinforcement and

environmental improvement, the section in Pinggu District is scheduled to open as early as the end of 2026, according to the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau.

The Great Wall in Beijing, primarily built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), stretches over 500 km across several districts. Pinggu District is home to more than 200 sites spanning over 50 km.

The pass of Jiangjunguan is the first major gateway at the eastern end of the Ming Great Wall within Beijing. A thoroughfare historically, it was a strategically vital location contested by military forces.

Free Childbirth

China has announced an ambitious plan to make childbirth essentially free for parents under national insurance guidelines in 2026.

The move, revealed at a national healthcare security conference on December 13, is part of a broader strategy to address the country's declining birth rate by reducing the financial burden of having children.

Authorities said they will enhance medical expense coverage for prenatal checkups based on the affordability of the national medical insurance fund.

The goal for 2026 is to ensure the basic costs of childbirth are fully covered by insurance programs nationwide, with individuals paying nothing out-of-pocket for standard delivery services within policy limits.

Seven provincial-level regions, including Jilin, Jiangsu and Shandong, already provide full coverage for in-hospital childbirth medical expenses within the policy scopes.

Officials noted that the commitment applies to standard medical services. If expecting parents choose premium-priced hospitals, or opt for medications or materials not included in the basic insurance catalog, those additional expenses will not be reimbursed.

The National Healthcare Security Administration is also planning to expand maternity insurance eligibility to include flexible workers, migrant workers, and people in new forms of employment, among other measures designed to encourage childbirth.

China's maternity insurance now covers approximately 255 million people.

XINHUA

Snow Scene

Tourists visit the Palace Museum, China's imperial palace complex from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) and one of the world's largest and best-preserved ancient wooden architectural sites, in Beijing on December 13, after the city saw its first significant snowfall of this winter season on December 12.

Tourist Resources

Over the past two years, more than 58,000 tourist resources have been identified in Xizang Autonomous Region, including over 31,000 newly discovered and recognized resources.

The data were revealed in the regional capital of Lhasa on December 12 at a meeting that reviewed the results of a regional tourist resource survey.

Launched in August 2023, the survey covered 74 counties and districts across the region.

The survey yielded a range of additional outcomes, including special studies on border tourism, high-altitude health and wellness tourism, plateau ecology and heritage tourist routes.

Zhang Xuechao, deputy director of the regional department of culture and tourism, said that the department will use the survey results to promote the transformation of tourist resources into tourism products.

In 2024, Xizang received nearly 63.9 million tourists from home and abroad, up 15.81 percent from the previous year.

XINHUA

Let the Carnival Commence!

Ice sculptures at the Harbin Ice-Snow World in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, on December 17. The Harbin Ice-Snow World, the world's largest ice and snow theme park, officially opened for the season that same day, unveiling its most spectacular edition yet, featuring landmark attractions, thoughtful services and magnificent ice sculptures across a record 1.2 million square meters of park area.

Railway Passenger Trips

China's railway network handled a record-high number of passenger trips during the first 11 months of 2025, data from China State Railway Group Co. Ltd. (China Railway), the country's railway operator, showed on December 16.

In the January-November period, the number of railway passenger trips reached 4.28 billion across the country, up 6.6 percent from the same period last year, according to China Railway.

An average of 11,258 passenger trains operated daily during the period, up 7.1 percent year on year, the railway company said.

Cross-border passenger transport also gained momentum, with the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the China-Laos Railway handling 28.94 million and 244,000 cross-border passenger trips, respectively, during the period.

Service Outsourcing

The Ministry of Commerce and five other government departments have released an action plan on promoting the high-quality development of the service outsourcing industry.

By 2030, several leading service outsourcing enterprises with international competitiveness will be cultivated, a group of service outsourcing clusters with strong innovation capabilities and distinct characteristics will be built, the number of people employed in the sector will be markedly higher, and the digitalization, degree of intelligence and greenness of service outsourcing will be enhanced, according to the plan.

Thirteen key tasks will be undertaken, including supporting the high-quality development of service outsourcing demonstration cities, building digital trade industrial clusters, and strengthening the cultivation of service outsourcing talent, it said.

Musical Theater Market

China's musical theater market saw great expansion in 2025, with nearly 19,700 performances staged nationwide and box office revenue reaching 1.8 billion yuan ($255 million), according to an annual industry report.

The report, jointly published by the China Association of Performing Arts and the Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Center, said total audience visits climbed to nearly 8.19 million, pointing to sustained growth in the sector.

A wave of original Chinese-language musicals has hit the market, with several new productions drawing on everyday life and distinct regional characteristics, emerging as unexpected standouts at the box office, the report said.

Imported musicals accounted for 51.4 percent of total box office revenue in 2025, reflecting a market where audience preferences are becoming increasingly diverse. High-quality productions based on classic intellectual properties, particularly those making their debut performances in China, attracted heightened attention.

Retail Sales

Nationwide retail sales of consumer goods went up 4 percent year on year in the first 11 months of 2025, totaling 45.61 trillion yuan ($6.4 trillion), data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on December 15.

During the period, retail sales of consumer goods in urban areas rose 3.9 percent year on year, while those in rural areas climbed 4.4 percent year on year, the data showed.

From January to November, online retail sales of goods grew at a faster pace, rising 5.7 percent year on year to almost 11.82 trillion yuan ($1.7 trillion), accounting for more than one quarter of the nation's total retail sales of consumer goods.

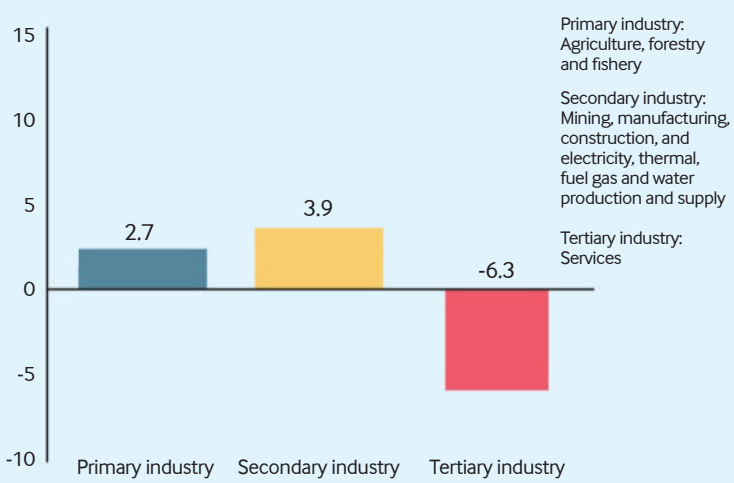
In November alone, retail sales of consumer goods went up 1.3 percent year on year.

In the first 11 months of 2025, service retail sales grew 5.4 percent year on year, with the growth rate up by 0.1 percentage point compared to the January-October period.

NUMBERS

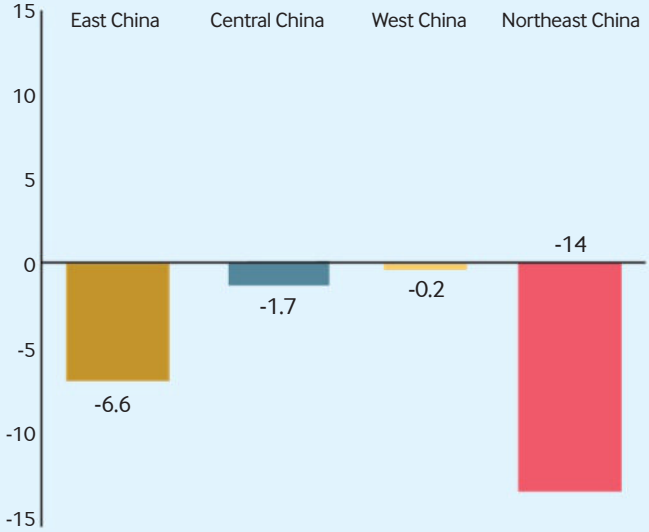
Fixed Assets Investment Growth by Sector

January-November (%; y.o.y.)



Fixed Assets Investment Growth by Region

January-November (%; y.o.y.)



Service retail categories such as culture and sports, as well as telecommunication and information, both registered double-digit sales growth.

Core AI Industry

The scale of China's core AI industry is expected to exceed 1.2 trillion yuan ($170 billion) in 2025, according to a research institute under the MIIT.

The China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT) noted at an industry forum held recently in Beijing that AI technology has reached a pivotal turning point, accelerating its shift from technical innovation to generating real-world productive forces.

The institute highlighted upgrades in large AI models this year, with their language and multi-modal understanding capabilities improving by 30 percent and 50 percent, respectively.

The sector of embodied intelligence—which integrates AI with robotics—has also seen rapid expansion, securing over 40 billion yuan ($5.7 billion) in financing and involving more than 350 companies across the industrial chain.

Beyond AI, the CAICT outlined a roadmap for next-generation connectivity at the event, predicting that China will launch commercial 6G applications around 2030, with large-scale deployment expected by 2035.

Foreign Banks

Foreign banks in Beijing have supported Chinese enterprises in conducting businesses abroad, sharing in the benefits of the growth of Chinese companies, said the Beijing branch of the National Financial Regulatory Administration (NFRA).

In 2024, these banks provided financial assistance to overseas businesses of 14,900 Chinese companies, with the total funding reaching 1.24 trillion yuan ($175.5 billion).

At present, 48 foreign banks from 17 countries and regions have established operational branches in Beijing.

The city will continue to serve as a testing ground for financial reforms and support the localized and specialized development of foreign banks, said the NFRA Beijing branch.

Box Office

As of December 13, China's 2025 box office revenue had surpassed 50 billion yuan ($7 billion), according to the China Film Administration.

Domestic films accounted for 40.952 billion yuan ($5.8 billion) in box office takings, representing 81.9 percent of the total.

Total admissions stood at 1.194 billion.

Fifty films had recorded box office revenue exceeding 100 million yuan ($14 million) during the year as of December 13, including 33 domestic productions and 17 foreign titles.

Chinese animation film *Ne Zha 2*, comedy *Detective Chinatown 1900*, Disney blockbuster *Zootopia 2*, and Chinese wartime films *Dead to Rights* and *Evil Unbound* ranked in the top five of the 2025 Chinese box office as of December 13.

Export License Management

China will manage exports of certain steel products through an export licensing system from January 1, 2026, according to a joint statement from the Ministry of Commerce and the General Administration of Customs of China on December 12.

Based on the related laws and regulations, the two authorities have decided to include certain steel products in a revised 2025 catalog of goods subject to export license management, the statement said.

It also said that foreign trade operators must apply for export licenses for the shipment of these goods. These applications require the submission of an export contract and a product quality inspection certificate issued by the manufacturer.

(Source: *National Bureau of Statistics*)

AUSTRALIA

Mourners lay flowers for the victims of the Bondi Beach shooting in Sydney on December 15. The death toll had risen to 16 as of December 18, with a father and son identified as the attackers. Another 40 people had been hospitalized for their injuries

GHANA

A celebration in honor of the 10th anniversary of the Confucius Institute at the University of Cape Coast in Cape Coast on December 15

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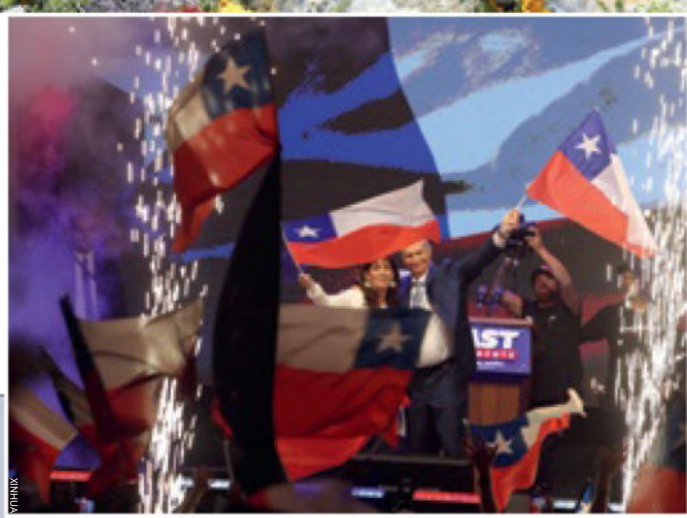

CHILE

José Antonio Kast (front right), candidate of the far-right Republican Party, waves the national flag to supporters after winning the second round of the presidential election in Santiago on December 14, becoming the country's new president

INDIA

Wreckage of buses after a multi-vehicle collision on the Delhi-Agra Expressway in Mathura District of Uttar Pradesh State on December 16. The death toll had risen to 15 as of December 18, with around 48 people injured

UNITED STATES

A woman in vintage clothing stands in front of the Holiday Nostalgia Train in New York City on December 14. The 1930s train runs every Sunday in December to celebrate the holiday season

KENYA

Soldiers participate in a parade during a celebration for the 62nd anniversary of the country's independence in Nairobi on December 12. It gained independence from Britain on December 12, 1963

EXPLORER OF FLAT METALS

Zhang Guangyu, 48, a researcher at the Institute of Physics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, has pioneered a path into the unknown world of two-dimensional (2D) metals. In March, his team's breakthrough—creating the world's first 2D metals—was named one of *Physics World* journal's Top 10 Breakthroughs of the Year for 2025.

For nearly a decade, Zhang and his team pursued what many considered nearly impossible: crafting metals just one atom thick. Using a technique called "van der Waals squeezing," they successfully produced ultrathin sheets of bismuth, tin, lead and other metals, opening up what Zhang describes as "a new treasure trove" for materials science.

This breakthrough opens up a new frontier in 2D metal research, and it holds the potential to revolutionize technologies such as ultrasmall, low-power transistors and transparent displays, the research team said.

A Higher Gear

Workers' Daily

December 18

On November 15, China approved two Level-3 autonomous driving models—one from Changan Automobile and the other from electric vehicle brand Arcfox—for operation on designated roads in Beijing and Chongqing municipalities.

Level-3 is seen as a pivotal threshold within the industry's sixth-tier technical standards, which begins from Level-0, where humans are in complete control of the vehicle, to Level-5, where no human intervention is required at all. While Level-2 systems provide driver assistance, Level-3 allows the vehicle to take charge of dynamic driving tasks under specific conditions. Drivers must be available to intervene when prompted, but need not continuously monitor the environment.

The policy also clarifies liability issues. Under the framework, manufacturers—not drivers—will be accountable for accidents when Level-3 functions are engaged.

This sets a higher bar for carmakers, who must now prioritize system safety and reliability as they bring new autonomous models to market. In practice, that means greater investment in research and testing—a pressure that is likely to accelerate technological progress across the industry.

Fading Frescoes

China Newsweek

December 8

In the Tang Dynasty (618-907), a fashionable pastime was visiting temples—not to pray, but to watch artists at work. As the galleries of their day, temples competed to secure the finest painters, knowing that a successful mural could draw worshipers in droves.

The figure who best embodied this golden age of Chinese fresco art was Wu Daozi. Unlike court painters who served emperors, Wu worked largely

"Modern technology, represented by AI, is paving new paths for preserving the craft. AI-assisted teaching systems can digitally decompose the bridge assembly and create visual, interactive digital models, making the craft easier for learners, especially younger generations, to understand."

Zheng Weigui, Deputy Director of the General Office, Zhejiang Provincial Center for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, in an interview with Xinhua News Agency, commenting on the protection of the local skill of making wooden arch bridges

"Bag charms are not just decorations; they are mobile 'mood regulators' and visual carriers of young people's identity. Charm products now account for over 35 percent of the brand's total plush toy stock. Since the beginning of this year, our total sales of charm products have exceeded 12 million units."

Liu Xiaobin, Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer of global lifestyle brand MINISO, in an interview with Xinhua

in temples. Legend holds that more than 300 temples in Chang'an (now Xi'an) and Luoyang, the dynasty's twin capitals, once displayed his works. None, however, remain. By the end of the dynasty, fires and collapsing wooden structures had erased them entirely.

What survived did so far from the capital. In Dunhuang, an oasis city in today's Gansu Province, the Vimalakirti figure on the east wall of Mogao Cave 103, with its confident brushwork and commanding presence, is often seen as closest in spirit to Wu's style.

More broadly, the wall paintings in Dunhuang record a gradual blending of different cultures: The Indian, Central Asian and ancient Roman elements visible in early works gradually gave way to the verdure landscapes commonly seen in Tang art.

What survives today, however, is only a tiny fraction of what once existed. To preserve these cultural assets, experts are calling for the creation of a national database and specialized research institutes to ensure these paintings are systematically recorded and protected.

Silver Shopping Streets

Ce.cn

December 13

Chinese cities are now carving out new commercial spaces for the elderly. So-called "silver shopping streets" are emerging across the country, offering everything from senior-focused retail and beauty salons to wedding photo studios for older couples. Many also host singing, dancing and photography classes tailored to retirees.

The rise of these commercial streets reflects a shift in China's consumer scene: The priorities of today's elderly consumers have moved beyond the basics of food and clothing toward more personalized and high-quality services. Demand is rising for services that support health management, education, leisure, travel and wellness.

Many seniors prefer face-to-face interaction, relying on touch, sight and interpersonal interaction to build trust in a certain brand or commodity. In addition, many goods and services aimed at older consumers require professional explanation, adjustment and guidance, which underscores the distinct value of brick-and-mortar settings for this demographic.

In this context, silver shopping streets provide not only one-stop access to senior-friendly goods and services but also important public spaces where seniors can socialize, pursue new interests and better integrate into their urban surroundings.

CHRONICLER OF RURAL CHINA

Li Peifu, 72, is a literary chronicler of the Chinese countryside and its complex ties to identity and change. On December 15, he received the Outstanding Writer Award at the Du Fu Literature Prize—the highest literary honor in Henan Province—cementing his status as one of the province's most influential authors.

Best known for his 1999 novel *Door of the Sheepfold*, Li delves into the intricate fabric of village life. His writing, including the Mao Dun Literary Prize-winning *The Book of Life*, traces the spiritual journeys of ordinary people caught between tradition and transformation.

Through what he calls "plains records," Li gives voice to the tensions and resilience of rural China, crafting what has become essential reading on modernity's impact on the land and its people.

"Although structural issues persist, the country's job market remains generally stable, and the country is on track to achieve the annual target of reaching an urban unemployment rate of around 5.5 percent."

Li Chang'an, a professor at the Academy of China Open Economy Studies at the University of International Business and Economics, as National Bureau of Statistics data show China's urban unemployment rate for the 16-24 age group (excluding students) improved to 16.9 percent in November from 17.3 percent in October

"International relations today can be complex and sometimes tense, but youth can contribute in a different way. When young people meet face to face, trust is built naturally."

Tan Jiale, a Malaysian student at Peking University and co-organizer of youth cultural festival SEA YOU@ASEAN 2025, during the festival in Beijing on December 14

Sanya Central Business District, one of the key areas of the Hainan Free Trade Port, in Sanya City, Hainan Province, on November 1

COVER STORY

THE ISLAND THAT CAN

A gateway opened by innovation, linking Hainan to global flows By Tao Zihui

XINHUA

A new frontier has been drawn in Hainan—not in concrete, but in policy. The southern island province, the world's largest free trade port (FTP) by area, officially began operation as a special customs area on December 18.

At the Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) China office in Haikou's Fullsing Internet Industrial Park, a large screen displays real-time requests for global corporate verification. D&B's China President, Wu Guangyu, recently approved an application for a D-U-N-S Number—a unique nine-digit identifier for businesses, which stands for data universal number system. It can help potential partners and lenders learn about a business.

"When the Hainan Free Trade Port master plan was announced in 2020, we recognized tremendous potential demand," Wu told *Beijing Review*. "Many international firms want to enter Hainan, and just as many local companies are preparing to expand overseas."

The launch of the island-wide special customs operation does not signal a closing off, but rather a new frontier of openness. Through policy innovation, Hainan is strengthening core industries such as technology, healthcare, digital services and cultural tourism. The goal is to build a hub for new quality productive forces—a term that refers to China's push toward innovation-driven, technology-led and high-quality growth across all economic sectors. By facilitating the flow of data, talent and capital, Hainan aims to become a key junction in the global network of trade and opportunity.

The confidence of being unique

Not long ago, Josef Gregory Mahoney, a professor of politics at the School of Politics and International Relations at East China Normal University, emphasized in an interview with newspaper *Hainan Daily*: "You sometimes hear people say that it's not far-fetched to imagine Hainan becoming a next Dubai." "In fact, Hainan will never be a next Dubai," he said. "Hainan is unique because it will be the world's largest free trade port. It creates unique, unparalleled opportunities for investment as well as what we can rightly assume will be further liberating policies."

This uniqueness is translating into tangible policy dividends. Starting December 18, the scope of zero-tariff policies has been greatly expanded—the vast majority of imported goods, from high-end scientific research equipment and biomedicine raw materials to daily consumer goods and production materials, will now enter Hainan exempt from tariffs, import value-added tax, and consumption tax.

Furthermore, enterprises registered and operating in Hainan are subject to a corporate income tax rate of 15 percent. Compared to the common 25-percent rate in other parts of the Chinese mainland, this is highly competitive. The individual income tax policy ▶▶

is also attractive. For high-end and urgently needed talents working in Hainan, the portion of their individual income tax burden exceeding 15 percent is directly exempted—a policy with clear advantages for attracting global talent.

Hainan also implements the country's shortest negative list for foreign investment, a list that clearly defines sectors or industries where foreign investment is restricted or prohibited, lowering barriers for foreign capital in sectors like finance, education, healthcare and culture. This is more than just a change in tax numbers; it means a hesitant investment project could become profitable because of it.

A port for data

The establishment of D&B in Hainan is considered a landmark event. The 180-year-old U.S.-based commercial data services provider set up a key Chinese operational node in Haikou in 2022. "As a hub for Hainan's digital economy, Fullsing Internet Industrial Park is the best platform for us to connect with clients," Wu explained.

To date, D&B Hainan has issued D-U-N-S Numbers to over 160,000 enterprises. More notably, relying on Hainan's special policy of "secure and orderly cross-border data flow," D&B can process global data from its Hainan base, including data from nearly 260,000 Hong Kong enterprises.

"We anticipate that after the launch, trade volume will become very brisk, and demand for D&B's future products will also flourish," Wu said. "With the operation of the Hainan FTP, D&B will also welcome more ecosystem partners from our industry to jointly create more data application scenarios."

In a livestreaming studio in Fullsing Internet Industrial Park, Pakistani host Usman has just finished a late-night broadcast. Benefiting from Hainan's policies on secure, orderly cross-border data flow and relaxed regulations for foreigners working in China, he has become a well-known cross-border live-commerce host in the park, experiencing firsthand an open business environment that facilitates buying from and selling to the world.

Wu Qingji, Industrial General Manager of the Fullsing Internet Industrial Park, confirmed this trend with data: "Over the past few years, our park has cumulatively served over 100 overseas investment projects, with a total outbound investment filing amount exceeding $3 billion, mainly concentrated in the Internet and new energy-related industrial chains."

The skies and the deep sea

Changes brought by the customs operation are also appearing in physical spaces. At the one-stop aircraft maintenance industrial base in the Haikou Airport Comprehensive Bonded Zone, workers from Haikou Airport Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Co. Ltd. perform full-body repaints on wide-body jets.

"Bonded aircraft maintenance is a game-changer!" Wang Haiye, General Manager of the company told newspaper *People's Daily*. "Inbound repairs are exempt from deposit requirements, the bonded aviation materials supermarket is well-stocked, and our wide-body repainting speed is over twice as fast as that of our counterparts." The quality service led Qatar Airways to finalize a three-year cooperation agreement.

In the first 10 months of this year, the value of bonded maintenance at Haikou Airport Comprehensive Bonded Zone surged to 47.86 billion yuan ($6.8 billion), up 71.8 percent year on year. This growth is fueled by streamlined processes—from pilot supervision for temporary repairs to fast-track customs clearance—enabling Hainan to serve as a global hub for aircraft maintenance. Through such institutional innovation, the FTP is accelerating the flow of people, goods and capital across the island.

Meanwhile, in south Hainan, opening up is advancing in another dimension. Yazhou Bay has gathered top national agricultural research capabilities, building a "Silicon Valley for the seed industry" to safeguard national food security. Relying on the Institute of Deep-sea Science and Engineering under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the province is forging ahead into the blue economy, including deep-sea technology and marine pharmaceuticals. Also, every launch at Hainan's Wenchang

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A Star Cruise liner arrives in Sanya carrying around 1,200 tourists from 16 countries and regions on September 4

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The Fullsing Internet Industrial Park in the Hainan Free Trade Port, Haikou City in Hainan, on November 13

Spacecraft Launch Site is propelling the rise of China's commercial aerospace industry.

Wider openness

Data from the Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone show it has taken the lead in introducing over 520 kinds of internationally innovative pharmaceuticals and medical devices. From January to October, the zone received 564,900 medical tourism visits, an 81-percent year-on-year increase.

"Within the FTP context, international personnel flow is more convenient," Yan Lukai, Director of the Medical Tourism Department under the pilot zone's administrative bureau, said. "Hainan's unique climatic and environmental advantages are important factors attracting domestic and international patients. The favorable climate aids patient recovery. Meanwhile, advantages in product import and export make medical costs and the introduction of medical technical talent more competitive."

At the Sanya Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital (Sanya TCM Hospital), foreign tourists can also experience acupuncture and massage. The hospital has established four AI-powered remote consultation platforms and set up three TCM centers overseas, achieving integrated development of culture, tourism and wellness. In the first 10 months of this year, the hospital treated 8,288 foreign patients, a 40.83-percent increase year on year.

Hainan's cruise and yacht industries are entering a golden age of high-quality growth, driven by pioneering policies such as zero tariffs for yachts, simplified entry for private vessels, and multi-port clearance for foreign cruise ships. These measures are attracting top-tier international resources and building practical expertise to support the continued evolution of the FTP.

A telling example came on the morning of November 24, when the Norwegian *Endeavor*—carrying over 1,800 international passengers—docked at Sanya Phoenix Island International Cruise Terminal. Using an expedited clearance system for large ships, passengers cleared customs in just 10-15 seconds on average. Hosting China's first dedicated cruise hub, Sanya has cultivated a mature ecosystem, with more than 20 related enterprises now established and over 30 international cruise lines regularly calling at its port.

From January to October, Sanya recorded over 190,000 yacht voyages and welcomed 1.07 million yacht tourists, both representing a year-on-year growth of more than 15 percent—a clear sign of a virtuous cycle taking shape. With the full launch of the FTP, policies like multi-port cruise access and zero tariffs on imported yachts will provide continued momentum, propelling Sanya's cruise and yacht industries to new heights.

Underpinning all these measures is a robust legal framework. The Hainan Free Trade Port Law enacted in 2021 has codified key policies into national legislation, granting the island greater autonomy for reform. This rule-of-law foundation provides the stability and predictability highly valued by international capital. Mechanisms for international commercial arbitration and mediation are being strengthened in parallel.

The construction of the Hainan FTP is guided by a clear three-step blueprint: initial establishment by 2025, greater maturity by 2035, and full completion by mid-century.

The special customs operation was launched without fanfare, yet its impact is already tangible, in automated tax processing, real-time data exchange, adjusted international flight schedules and more global conversations.

"For people who are coming to this place now and building positions here, it will position them well for the growing opportunities inevitably coming," Mahoney said in his interview. That future is already taking shape. As the hands of history turn, a new tide rises over this land of endless summer. **BR**

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
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COVER STORY

A TESTING GROUND

What does the Hainan Free Trade Port mean to the world? By Li Nan

David Adrian Janke, a British citizen operating a translation company in Haikou, capital of Hainan Province in south China, witnessed surging orders as special customs operations got underway in the island province on December 18.

This endeavor is one of the key measures to build Hainan into an influential free trade port (FTP) by the mid-21st century. "It means that Hainan is relatively independent in the traditional domestic customs area and enters a higher level, broader scope and deeper system of liberalization and facilitation, becoming an important experimental field for China's institutional innovation for global trade," Zhao Zhongxiu, President of the Beijing-based University of International Business and Economics, told *Beijing Review*.

Janke echoed Zhao's views. "The island-wide special customs operations will likely only accelerate the pace of development. With development come opportunities," he told *Beijing Review*.

More foreign-invested enterprises

Janke has been living in China since 2007, previously working as an English teacher in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Shanghai and Nanjing in Jiangsu Province. In August 2020, two months after China rolled out its master plan to build Hainan into an FTP, Janke relocated to Hainan and continued his teaching career in Qionghai, a city in east Hainan.

Starting up a translation service company had long been Janke's dream. However, it hadn't come true due to a lack of startup funding. His dream was reactivated when Janke met an American friend who had started a business in Hainan. It was then that he got to know that the process for foreigners to found their own companies in Hainan is convenient and the corporate tax is just 15 percent, 10 percentage points lower than that in most other provinces in the Chinese mainland.

In January 2022, Janke moved to Haikou and started his own company. "My company is involved in translation, which falls under the category of modern services, one of the four pillar industries in Hainan," he said. Hainan focuses on a wide array of industries, ranging from its four key industries—tourism, modern services, hi-tech industries and high-efficiency tropical agriculture—to future-oriented industries such as commercial aerospace, plant genetics, and deep-sea science and technology, and consumer sectors like duty-free shopping, education and healthcare.

"These sectors offer a broad platform for career development and entrepreneurial ventures," Janke said. Thanks to the opportunities brought by the development of the Hainan FTP, his company has received many orders from government agencies and enterprises, which makes him feel like "being in the right industry in the right place at the right time."

Janke is not alone. According to the Registration Bureau of the Hainan Provincial Market Supervision Administration, as of late August, the number of foreign-invested enterprises in Hainan had reached 10,690, an increase of 13.61 percent compared to the same period last year, with the growth rate ranking first in the country for eight consecutive months. Also, 74 percent of these foreign-invested enterprises were established after June 1, 2020, the day the master plan to build Hainan into an FTP was released.

A new phase

In April 2018, China announced a plan to build Hainan into a pilot free trade zone (FTZ) and then an FTP in a step-by-step and phased manner. China's pilot FTZs are designated areas where special economic policies and regulations are tested to promote trade liberalization, investment and economic development.

Hainan is not only an island but is also larger than other FTPs around the world, such as Singapore and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Hainan is approximately 35,400 square km in size, 48 times the size of Singapore and 8.6 times the size of Dubai. "This means more space for diversified industrial development, including logistics, trade and deep-sea industries," Zhao said.

The commencement of special customs operations on December 18 was one of the milestones in the development of the Hainan FTP. The island will be transformed into a special customs supervision zone, implementing a liberation and facilitation policy system characterized by "freer access at the first line, regulated access at the second line and free flows within the island."

"Freer access at the first line" means treating the border between the Hainan FTP and all other countries

and regions outside China's customs territory as the "first line" and implementing a series of free and convenient entry-exit measures. "By permitting foreign nationals from 86 countries to visit the island visa-free for almost any purpose for up to 30 days, Hainan has created a valuable space for facilitating cultural and talent exchanges, enabling foreign nationals to experience the real China firsthand and, if so inclined, explore potential career opportunities," Janke said.

Also, after special customs operations got underway, the zero-tariff goods list expanded from 1,900 tariff items, about 21 percent of all tariff items, to more than 6,600 items, about 74 percent of the total.

"Hainan is an island province, which determines the uniqueness of its special customs operations," Zhao said. He added that the institutional innovations of the Hainan FTP are not limited to facilitating customs clearance; they represent a systemic reform, including zero tariffs, low tax rates, a free and convenient cross-border capital flow mechanism, and a digitalized and intelligent regulatory system. As a result, the Hainan FTP far exceeds traditional FTZs in terms of institutional integrity and openness.

"The special customs operations are expected to significantly reduce the institutional costs of foreign goods flowing into Hainan, enabling Hainan to function as a gateway for global goods," Zhao said. "At the same time, strict regulation of the second line ensures that possible risks of the FTP do not spill over, safeguarding national tax revenue and market security. The FTP therefore strikes a balance between liberalization and regulation."

Zhao believes the special customs operation will result in three positive effects: injecting strong momentum into Hainan's high-quality development, opening broader space for China's international economic and trade cooperation, and setting an example for China's high-level opening up.

VCG

Officers assist visitors with entry procedures at the Haikou Meilan International Airport in Haikou, Hainan Province, on December 18

Regionally, Hainan will play a more prominent role as a gateway connecting the Chinese mainland, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific and Indian Ocean markets. Hainan will serve as a new platform for cooperation between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as other Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) member countries. The RCEP is a free trade pact comprising the 10 ASEAN member states and five of their major trading partners—China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

The Hainan FTP will facilitate the entry of foreign goods and build a more stable regional trade network, Zhao said.

At the same time, the province will foster a business environment that aligns with international standards, attracting global companies to invest in China. Hainan will become a vital channel for global capital to enter China, and its open environment for talent development and cultural interaction will promote the island's development as a regional tourism, exhibition and cultural hub, Zhao added.

"The Hainan FTP is a comprehensive platform and testing ground for China's major opening-up initiatives," Ye Fujing, a researcher with the Beijing-based Academy of Macroeconomic Research, explained.

Challenges

"The province has clearly demonstrated the will and has dedicated the resources required to improve its international services offerings," Janke said.

He noted that establishing services such as international clinics in hospitals across the island and facilitating work and residence permit applications are an encouraging indication that Hainan intends to go all in on improving the living and working environment for foreign nationals. In terms of the business environment, initiatives such as providing bilingual investment guides are narrowing the gap, making it easier for investors and entrepreneurs to get started in Hainan.

"The Hainan FTP is rapidly developing," Janke said, adding he has seen new faces from different countries at almost every recent▸▸

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The Canadian Pavilion at the fifth edition of the China International Consumer Products Expo held in Hainan from April 13 to 18

social gathering. "My company has already helped a few foreign nationals set up their own companies here this year."

However, challenges persist. "To be entirely honest, Hainan still has a long way to go in terms of 'internationalizing' its living and business environment," Janke said.

More accessible talent support policies are needed. "I hope that Hainan can introduce more readily accessible talent support policies for foreign nationals, including offering its own preferential policy for permanent residence, similar to those of other special zones, such as the Lin-gang Special Area of the China (Shanghai) Pilot FTZ in Shanghai and Zhongguancun Science Park in Beijing," Janke added.

Zhao thinks that besides learning from FTZs and FTPs at home and abroad, Hainan needs to take the initiative to blaze a new trail and become a leader in high-level opening up. "Hainan cannot always follow; it must also have the foresight to lead, knowing where it is headed," Zhao said. However, at the moment, Hainan's own capabilities in this regard are insufficient. "More talents and new brains are needed in Hainan," he added.

As for Janke, becoming a permanent residence holder in Hainan is one of his goals. "I look forward to the day when I finally fulfill the requirements to apply for permanent residence in China," he said. **BR**

Special Customs Operations

The Hainan FTP will implement a special supervision model described as "freer access at the first line, regulated access at the second line and free flows within the island."

The "first line" refers to Hainan's connection with overseas markets. "Freer access at the first line" allows overseas goods to enter the island more conveniently, with most benefiting from zero tariffs and expedited clearance.

The "second line" refers to the customs boundary between Hainan and the mainland, where goods will undergo standard customs oversight to ensure fairness and prevent smuggling.

The two-tiered customs system enables freer trade between Hainan and areas outside China's customs borders.

(Source: *Xinhua News Agency*)

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Reframing Openness

By Dun Zhigang

The Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC), held in Beijing on December 10-11, sent a clear signal: China will remain committed to becoming more open.

Notably, the conference identified "steadily advancing institutional opening up and expanding self-initiated opening up in the services sector in an orderly manner" as a key pillar of China's opening-up agenda for the coming year and for the broader 15th Five-Year Plan (2025-30) period.

This emphasis signals a new phase in China's opening up. The focus is shifting toward the quality of rules, the leading role of services and a stronger commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation. Seen from this standpoint, institutional opening up and the opening up of the services sector go beyond economics and speak to issues of global governance.

By contributing more public goods in the areas of rules, standards and regulatory coordination, the country can promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation while engaging more substantively in global agendas ranging from digital governance to climate action and public health.

As major reform measures and opening-up initiatives continue to take effect, an increasingly open China—one with more mature institutions, higher-end services and broader cooperation—will amplify its role as a stabilizer and growth engine amid profound global changes. This will inject new momentum into China's own high-quality development, while offering stronger support

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The China International Fair for Trade in Services in session in Beijing on September 14

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Visitors experience an electric aircraft on display at a trade expo in Linyi, Shandong Province, on June 27

and practical solutions for global economic recovery and the evolution of global governance.

From market access to rule alignment

The CEWC sent an unambiguous message: China's opening up in the new era is no longer confined to the cross-border flow of goods, capital or people. Instead, it increasingly centers on proactively aligning domestic rules, regulations, governance practices and standards with high-level international economic and trade norms.

China has largely completed a phase of opening up defined by tariff reductions and port access. It is now accelerating toward a new form anchored in institutional alignment. At its core, institutional opening up seeks to build a transparent, stable and predictable business environment through regulatory innovation and reforms across key areas such as property rights protection, industrial subsidies, environmental and labor standards, government procurement, e-commerce, and financial regulation. The goal is deep compatibility between China's domestic institutional framework and widely accepted international rules.

The conference's arrangements carry at least three layers of strategic significance.

They represent a critical step toward offsetting external uncertainty and strengthening China's initiative in opening up. Today, global competition over openness has shifted from tariff levels to rule-making power. From digital trade and green investment to supply chain security and cross-border data flows, high-standard rules have become decisive variables shaping the global division of labor. By steadily expanding institutional opening up, China is embedding its development more deeply into the global economic system through higher-quality rule provision, moving from passive adaptation to more active participation in shaping the rules.

This approach also reflects a systemic effort to use opening up to drive reform. Institutional opening up is, by nature, reform-oriented. Benchmarking against high-standard agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement creates pressure for domestic improvements in competition policy, environmental regulation, labor protection and digital governance. This process helps remove hidden barriers and close institutional gaps, fostering a truly unified, fair, transparent and predictable domestic market, and translating visible institutional improvements into tangible market opportunities for businesses.

In addition, it provides a practical pathway for expanding "institutional dividends." Whether through the "pressure-testing" of pilot free trade zones as they align comprehensively with high-standard trade rules, or through the island-wide special customs operations of the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP), China is using pilot programs and phased experimentation to generate verifiable results and replicable models. Once institutional opening up reaches a sufficient scale, it no longer means opening a single city or strengthening one port. Instead, it enables nationwide optimization of resource allocation through coordinated institutional change.

As China continues to advance institutional opening up along the direction outlined by this CEWC, it will participate in global economic governance at a deeper level, offering the world more stable, transparent and reliable institutions.

A second growth curve

If institutional opening up defines the framework of China's opening-up strategy, the orderly expansion of self-initiated opening up in the services sector identifies the key point of breakthrough for the next stage: services.

China has ranked first globally in goods trade for several consecutive years. Its services trade has also remained among the world's largest and, in 2024, surpassed the $1-trillion mark for the first time. Growth has been especially strong in high-end producer services and digital trade. Against this backdrop, the CEWC designated the orderly expansion of self-initiated opening up in the services sector as a key task, signaling a clear intention to use services as a pivot for ▶▶

cultivating a "second growth curve" for the Chinese economy.

"Orderly" refers to pace and boundaries. Opening up will proceed by sector and by region, while refraining from crossing redlines related to national security, data security and financial stability. What can be opened will be opened decisively; what requires caution will be approached prudently; and what must be regulated will be governed with precision. "Self-initiated," meanwhile, underscores initiative. This is not opening up under external pressure, but a process guided by China's own development stage, industrial structure and comparative advantages, with clear roadmaps and timelines for what to open, to whom and how.

In practical terms, self-initiated opening up is taking shape along several key policy directions.

Deeper market access is being pursued in a range of priority sectors. Finance, telecommunications, healthcare, education, culture and professional services are among the most sensitive areas of services liberalization worldwide, and they are also where high-value segments of global value chains tend to concentrate. By continuously narrowing negative lists, lists that specify fields that are off-limits to business entities, and expanding areas of equal market access, China can attract more high-quality foreign investment into its services sector while pushing domestic firms to upgrade capabilities and service quality. Full competition, in turn, creates the conditions for the emergence of globally competitive service brands.

At the same time, China is working to build advantages in emerging fields. The conference called for encouraging services exports and accelerating the development of digital and green trade. This signals China's determination not only to remain a global manufacturing hub, but also to become a provider of global solutions in areas such as cloud computing, industrial online applications, AI-enabled services, green finance and carbon asset management. China aims to become a global solutions provider in digital and green services, participating in global rule-making and standard-setting through openness and cooperation.

Equally important is the effort to balance international norms with domestic realities in institutional design. Services trade is deeply intertwined with issues such as cross-border data flows, personal privacy protection and algorithmic governance. China needs to engage proactively with international norms and advance cooperation on digital trade rules and green finance standards, while taking into account domestic developments. The objective is to build an institutional framework that combines openness, security and inclusiveness, offering a distinct Chinese pathway for global governance of services trade.

As self-initiated opening up in the services sector moves from incremental pilot programs to a more systematic rollout, China's foreign trade structure is likely to shift from one dominated by goods trade to a dual-engine model driven jointly by goods and services. In undergoing this shift, China will accelerate its move toward the middle and upper segments of global value chains.

Not a solo, but a chorus

Opening up is not a one-way solo performance, but a multilateral chorus built on shared gains. By underlining the importance of promoting win-win cooperation across multiple fields, the CEWC delivered a clear message: China's opening up is not solely about boosting domestic efficiency. It is also a proactive response to the global demand for stability, predictability and development opportunities.

High-level institutional opening up and

Central Economic Work Conference Takeaways

Five Musts

- Fully tap into the economic potential
- Continue to pursue both policy support and reform and innovation
- Ensure both market vitality and effective regulation
- Combine investment in physical assets with investment in human capital
- Respond to external challenges by strengthening internal capabilities

Eight Key Tasks

- Maintain domestic demand as a focus in building a robust domestic market
- Enhance innovation-driven development to accelerate the cultivation of new growth drivers
- Deepen reform to enhance the momentum and vitality of high-quality development
- Steadily advance institutional opening up and expand self-initiated opening up in the services sector in an orderly manner
- Promote coordinated development to facilitate integrated urban-rural development and regional synergy
- Promote comprehensive green transition with the goals of achieving carbon emissions peaking and carbon neutrality
- Prioritize people's livelihoods and take practical measures to achieve concrete results for the people
- Proactively and prudently defuse risks in key areas with a focus on stabilizing the real estate market

(Source: *Xinhua News Agency*)

services trade expansion will continue to position China as a stabilizing anchor within global cooperation networks. At a time when protectionism is on the rise and trade and investment are becoming increasingly fragmented, China's firm support for the multilateral trading system centered on the World Trade Organization, its push for more high-standard regional and bilateral trade and investment agreements, and its efforts to advance integrated development between trade and investment, as well as between domestic and external markets, all send a strong signal of long-term commitment to openness.

With goods trade ranking first in the world for eight consecutive years and services trade continuing to expand, China has become a major trading partner for more than 150 countries and regions. Investing in China remains a strategic choice for multinational companies with a long-term global outlook. As the dividends of institutional opening up are further unleashed, platforms such as pilot free trade zones and the Hainan FTP will become more closely connected with the Belt and Road Initiative, BRICS cooperation and other multilateral frameworks, offering countries around the world more diverse market options and channels for cooperation.

A higher level of openness will also act as a powerful multiplier for mutually beneficial cooperation between China and the rest of the world. Whether in digital and green trade, or in healthcare, education, culture and tourism services, opening up in the services sector generates strong spillover effects. It supports industrial upgrading and job optimization within China, while enabling technology transfer, capacity building and standard alignment that help other developing economies strengthen their participation in global value chains. In this way, openness fosters a community with shared interests, one in which gains are increasingly intertwined. **BR**

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Customers browse products at a store of Chinese pop culture brand POP MART in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on May 21

Harmony Versus Hegemony

By Michael Dunford

In January 2017 at the United Nations Office at Geneva, Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke about a community with a shared future for humanity. In that speech, Xi asked five questions: What has happened to the world? How should we respond? Where did we come from? Where are we now? And where are we going?

These important questions derive from the great changes underway in the world today and the great challenges and crises confronting planet Earth and its people. They also reflect an understanding that rapid development of the world's productive forces necessitates supportive changes in social relations, which are often resisted.

Addressing deficits

In a subsequent speech at the First Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in Beijing in May 2017, Xi identified the challenges confronting humankind as being three deficits: a deficit of peace, a deficit of development and a deficit of governance. In March 2019, he added a deficit of trust as a central problem in the realm of international relations.

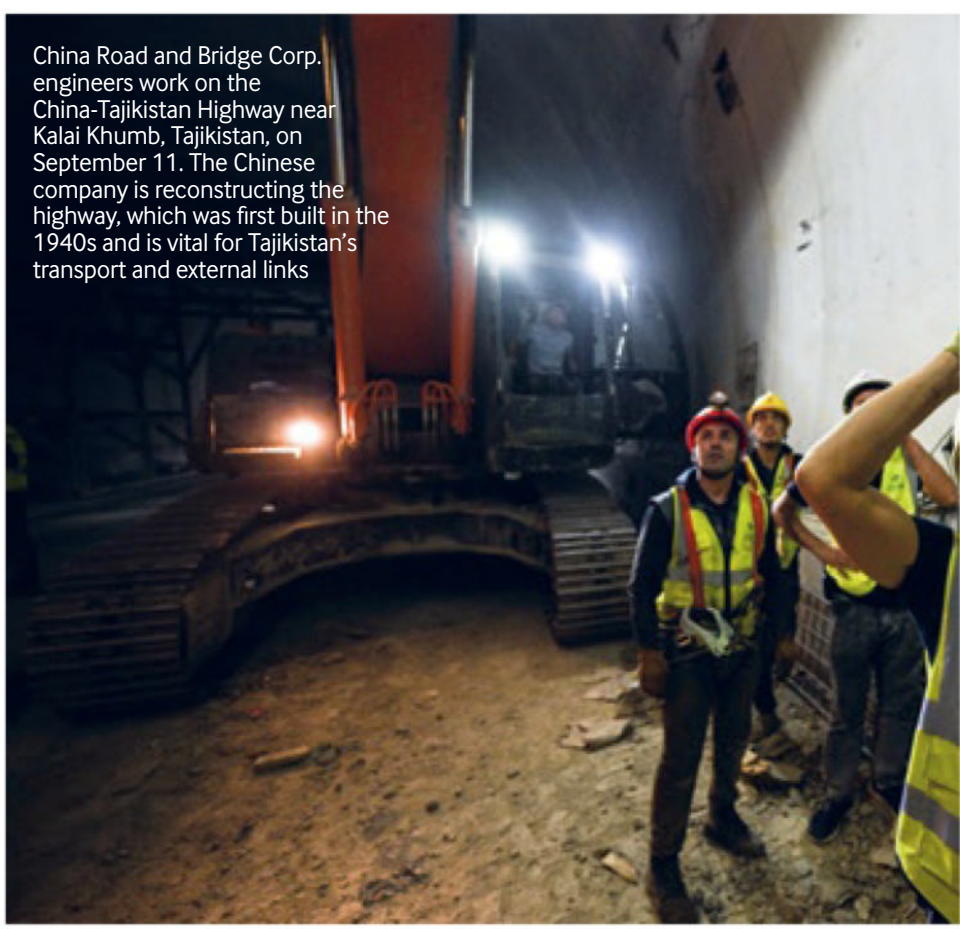
In response to these deficits, which are the basis of many of the most important challenges the world at present confronts, Xi has put forward, on behalf of China, four initiatives that together contribute to the construction of a community with a shared future for humanity: the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilizations Initiative and the Global Governance Initiative.

China's concept of a community with a shared future for humanity embodies what Xi, during the World Economic Forum Virtual Event of the Davos Agenda in January 2021, called the "common values of humanity," namely, peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom.

In referring to widely shared generic concepts, Xi emphasized the importance of avoiding "ideological prejudice." Xi was in effect opposing the attempt of Western powers to identify common values with specific Western institutions and to impose them on the rest of the world: Democracy, meaning the rule of the people, can assume a multiplicity of forms, as can national development paths.

Whether a country is or is not a democracy can be judged in the light of whether or not its political order delivers substantive improvements in the lives of all of its people. The positions and proposals that Xi has put forward reflect non-Western ways of addressing international and domestic issues.

In February 2021, then newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave several speeches and interviews in which he repeated the line: "The world doesn't organize itself. When we're not engaged, when we don't lead, then one of two things



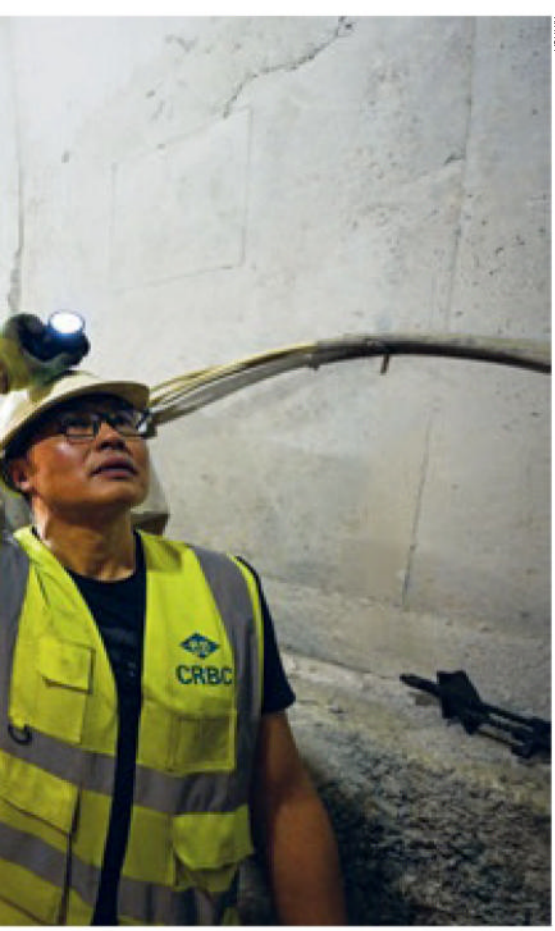
China Road and Bridge Corp. engineers work on the China-Tajikistan Highway near Kalai Khumb, Tajikistan, on September 11. The Chinese company is reconstructing the highway, which was first built in the 1940s and is vital for Tajikistan's transport and external links

happens: either some other country tries to take our place, but probably not in a way that advances our interests and values, or no one does, and then you get chaos."

A fundamental premise of Western liberalism is the view that individual human beings and nations are self-interested actors incapable of agreement on the common good. In that situation, a national state is required to impose domestic order. Internationally the absence of a supranational state leads to a state of anarchy in which powerful nation states seek hegemony to advance their security and interests. Again, the problem is generalization from, and the alleged universality of, specifically Western experience.

A different vision

In the past, a polycentric East Asian *gongsheng* (symbiosis) system characterized by a set of principles, norms and codes of conduct relating to inter-state relations, in which large and small countries found a proper place, over the course of millennia fostered voluntary and tribute trade, and peaceful coexistence.



XINHUA

"If you want to establish yourself, help others to establish themselves; if you want to be successful, help others to be successful."

—Confucius (551-479 B.C.)

The central concept in Chinese international relations is harmony. Chinese and traditional East Asian visions are of a harmonious international order, the avoidance of conflict through pursuit of shared interests, mutual respect and non-interference. These visions are rooted in the Chinese concepts of "all under heaven" (*tianxia*), relationality (*guanxi*) and symbiosis.

Symbiosis emphasizes the existence of the self (an individual or nation) in relation to others rather than in isolation. *Guanxi* emphasizes relations of reciprocity, relational self-interest and ancient philosopher Confucius' adage: "If you want to establish yourself, help others to establish themselves; if you want to be successful, help others to be successful." In this light, the Chinese vision of the world is one in which the success of one country can be guaranteed only by the success of all.

In December 1972, when contemplating China's relationship with the world, Chairman Mao Zedong updated three stratagems recommended to the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644): "Dig deep tunnels, store grain everywhere and never seek hegemony." In Mao's updated stratagem, tunnels referred to air raid shelters. Mao drew on a traditional distinction between a king who rules by benevolence and righteousness and a hegemon who rules by power. Mao insisted that China should never seek hegemony and Xi says it never will.

In proposing the four initiatives to address international deficits of peace, development, security and governance, Xi drew on China's cultural traditions and wisdom in conjunction with Chinese socialism to identify a path centered on peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, non-interference, dialogue, cooperation and shared and equitable development.

In emphasizing the conformity of this vision with the United Nations Charter and with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence [proposed by China and inaugurated in 1954, namely, mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit—*Ed.*], Xi noted that these values are in fact widely shared, if not practiced.

In repeatedly insisting that China does not seek hegemony, Xi is also saying that the world does not need a hegemon (a global Leviathan) and indeed that the domination of one country by another is in fact an obstacle to world peace, global development and international order. **BR**

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Understanding American Right-Wing Populism

By Wang Dong

In recent years, right-wing populism has profoundly influenced the United States' political ecology. Centered on the populist ideology and President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) political movement, it is evolving into the core driving force reshaping America's political landscape and impacting the global political and economic order. A deep analysis of the roots, characteristics and real-world effects of American right-wing populism is key to understanding the contradictions in U.S. society.

The origins

The rise of contemporary American right-wing populism is not an accidental political phenomenon but the result of intertwined economic, political and social factors within the U.S., coupled with certain right-wing politicians' deliberate rhetoric and incitement.

From the economic dimension, the imbalances of economic globalization and American industrial workers' heightened economic grievances fuel the social mobilization basis for right-wing populism. Over the past decades, the U.S.-led neoliberal globalization has optimized global resource allocation. However, it has also aggravated imbalances in wealth distribution. U.S. multinational corporations and Wall Street financial capital reaped huge profits through outsourcing and financial speculation. In contrast, U.S. domestic manufacturing declined due to massive industrial relocation, causing the traditional industrial bases of the "Rust Belt" to wither. Blue-collar workers at home faced intensified unemployment risks, declining incomes and worsening living standards, trapped in the so-called "hillbilly elegy." The wealth gap widened, and social stratification became more pronounced.

According to the Federal Reserve's latest 2025 data, the wealthiest 0.1 percent of households control 13.8 percent of the nation's wealth, while the bottom 50 percent own only 2.5 percent. After the 2008 international financial crisis, government bailouts tilted excessively toward financial institutions, failing to benefit ordinary people effectively. This issue deepened public distrust of financial and political elites and disappointment with economic realities, creating fertile ground for populism to spread.

From the political dimension, right-wing populism often emerges as a direct response. When representative democracy fails to function and parties become bitterly polarized, it creates a perfect opportunity for populist leaders to rise.

On one hand, the trust relationship between the establishment elites and the electorate has faced an unprecedented crisis. Moneyed interests have long infiltrated U.S. politics, with interest groups manipulating elections and policymaking. The policy orientations of political elites are seriously disconnected from the demands of ordinary Americans, leading to low political participation and historic low levels of trust in traditional elites, accompanied by growing calls to break the existing order.

On the other hand, partisan polarization has intensified. On living standard issues such as immigration, public security, healthcare and education, Republicans and Democrats are locked in a long-term deadlock, with "veto politics" frequently played out. Many social problems remain unresolved, and public dissatisfaction with both parties continues to rise. This political predicament prompts the public to seek alternative representation. Populists seize the opportunity to advocate breaking the existing power structure, claiming to "reclaim the people's sovereignty," thus enabling right-wing populist forces to challenge traditional establishment parties.

Regarding the cultural dimension, the fragmentation of national identity and confrontations from the ongoing "culture war" have injected intrinsic momentum into right-wing populism.

Under multiculturalist policies, certain immigrant groups may experience a weaker alignment with a nation's dominant cultural norms. This dynamic can contribute to broader debates over national identity, often intensifying social tensions between advocates for pluralism and conservatives emphasizing traditional values. One observed consequence is the potential consolidation of a more assertive conservative identity among some portions of the native majority, which may increasingly frame national culture in exclusive terms.

The characteristics

American right-wing populism is characterized by a strong anti-establishment and anti-elite message, as well as tendencies toward nationalism, confrontational rhetoric and ideological division. These traits have greatly influenced the country's political dialogue, coalition-building, policy debates and

social identities.

A central feature of this populism is its reliance on binary divisions—"the people versus the elite" and "the outsider versus the establishment." It asserts that establishment elites have unfairly monopolized political and economic power, leading to widespread distrust in institutions. By sharply criticizing these elites and the existing system, populist figures often cast themselves as political outsiders. They claim to speak for ordinary citizens and advocate for systemic change, a strategy that resonates with disillusioned segments of the public and serves as an effective tool for political mobilization.

Since 2016, right-wing populist movements in the U.S. have prominently advanced an "America First" agenda, translating nationalist and immigration-restrictionist rhetoric into concrete policy measures. In the economic sphere, this has manifested as a turn toward protectionism, with the use of tariffs to favor domestic industries—a shift that has introduced much friction into the global trading system. On immigration, policy has emphasized stricter border controls and increased enforcement, which has become a central and deeply polarizing issue in domestic political and social debates.

Social media has helped propel its rise. Traditional populism relied on speeches, rallies and TV media. Today, right-wing populism exploits social media's algorithmic-induced viral spread and speed, bypassing traditional media "gatekeepers," e.g., journalists and editors, and building a new mobilization model. Using simple, emotional language, they spread extreme views, amplifying anger and fear, and quickly mobilizing supporters. They even announce policy positions directly via social media, shaping opinion beyond traditional media, creating a phenomenon of "social media agitation" that disrupts the U.S. system of political communication.

The real-world impact

The rise of right-wing populism not only reshapes U.S. domestic politics but also exerts multidimensional and systemic influence on its economy, society and foreign policy. It not only reflects a response to governance failure but also poses grave challenges to U.S. development—as well as the global order.

In recent years, right-wing populism has placed mounting strain on the foundations of U.S. democracy. Disputes over the 2020 U.S. presidential election's legitimacy fueled unrest, culminating in Trump supporters storming Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021. This incident severely damaged electoral credibility and directly challenged constitutional principles like checks and balances and peaceful transfer of power, shocking the democratic order.

The ideological and policy differences between the two major parties have become increasingly sharp and the space for political compromise continuously narrowed, leading the government to reach a governance deadlock frequently.

The domestic political consequences of right-wing populism have been accompanied by far-reaching economic effects. Trade protectionist policies driven by U.S. right-wing populism have negatively impacted the global economy. Since taking office in early 2025, the Trump-led government has imposed additional tariffs on many countries, increasing import costs for domestic firms, obstructing export markets and triggering retaliatory measures from other states. As a result, global industrial and supply chain stability has been severely undermined. U.S. consumers face rising price pressures, with low-income groups bearing the heaviest burden. In the long term, such measures will erode U.S. economic competitiveness and weaken the environment for international cooperation. Moreover, the short-term and volatile nature of populist policies has dampened business confidence, destabilized market expectations and heightened labor market fluctuations, undermining America's sustainable growth and compounding risks to the long-term stability of the global economy.

Socially, the spread of right-wing populism has further deepened existing fractures within American society. Simultaneously, the surge of anti-immigration sentiment fuels racial antagonism and undermines the rights of minority communities, intensifying America's social fragmentation. Besides, populist rhetoric is increasingly intertwined with misinformation and hate speech on social media platforms, escalating confrontations among groups with opposing views and eroding social cohesion.

These domestic dynamics have also shaped U.S. behavior on the international stage. In foreign affairs, U.S. right-wing populism has translated into policies marked by unilateralism and hegemonism. In recent years, the U.S. has disregarded international norms and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, withdrawing from UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the Paris Agreement, the Iran nuclear deal and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. These actions have undermined the global multilateral trading system, climate cooperation and nuclear non-proliferation regime, weakening U.S. international influence and leadership while accelerating disorder and restructuring of the international system.

Unless deep-seated structural problems in the U.S.—economic imbalances, widening inequality, political dysfunction and cultural fragmentation—are addressed, populism will inevitably resurface at historical junctures, transforming from an "undercurrent" into a "flood." **BR**

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Beyond Winning and Losing

By Liang Xiao

As 2025 enters its final week, media professionals on both sides of the Pacific appear to be taking stock of the year's major events in China-U.S. relations. A prevailing view is that the U.S. is ceding ground in this latest round of competition with China.

In this view, the outcome is clear: The tariff war launched by the U.S. has failed to cripple China's economy and instead has strained U.S. supply chains while heightening inflation risks, forcing Washington back to the negotiating table. In technology, the U.S. has begun easing its previous blockade against China, particularly in advanced semiconductors. On December 8, President Donald Trump announced that he would allow U.S. chip maker Nvidia to supply H200 AI chips to China, with similar arrangements for AMD, Intel, and other U.S. tech firms. On the diplomatic front, the Trump administration's newly released National Security Strategy frames U.S.-China competition primarily as an economic contest rather than a struggle over security or political systems, and when Japan, one of America's key allies in the Asia-Pacific, provoked China on the Taiwan question in early November, which Beijing considers as its core interest, Washington chose not to intervene.

This assessment finds a receptive audience in both countries. In China, the narrative of "the East rising and the West declining" bolsters the confidence of those long accustomed to decades of rapid economic expansion and rising living standards.

In the U.S., this narrative finds equally broad appeal. For critics, evidence of America losing ground to China serves as ammunition to attack the Trump administration's reform agenda. For President Trump and his supporters, any temporary setback reflects the previous administration's failures—amplifying the pessimism only reinforces the urgency of "Making America Great Again."

Yet framing the China-U.S. contest in simple win-lose terms may itself reflect strategic myopia. This logic echoes in the Western notion the China-U.S. relationship is an example of the "Thucydides Trap"—the historical determinism that a rising power will inevitably challenge the existing hegemon, the established power will inevitably respond, and war will inevitably follow, while the Chinese believe the coexistence of the two does not need to pose a challenge.

Never before have the world's two leading countries been so geographically distant yet so economically integrated. Confrontation between them would ultimately harm both sides.

One set of figures is particularly telling. After Trump launched the trade war with China in his first term in 2018, the U.S. share of China's exports shrank from 19.2 percent to 14.7 percent in 2024. Yet overall U.S. imports swelled by $253.3 billion in 2024, a 6.6-percent rise, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. The pattern appears to be this: Washington imposed tariffs to narrow the trade deficit with China, but without genuinely restoring manufacturing, America has simply increased imports from third countries to fill the gap. Yet no country can fully replace China's position in global supply chains, at least for the time being. In the end, those paying the higher price are American businesses and consumers.

Never before have the world's two leading countries been so geographically distant yet so economically integrated

Similar patterns emerge elsewhere. American technology restrictions forced China to invest heavily in indigenous innovation. China eventually broke through the bottlenecks, and U.S. companies lost market share. Similarly, although China controls over 90 percent of the global rare earth processing capacity, when Beijing imposed rare earth export controls as a countermeasure, Washington had no choice but to build its own processing capabilities. All of this could have been achieved through global cooperation and division of labor, ensuring optimal resource allocation.

The real outcome of China-U.S. competition in 2025 may be a stalemate with no winners. Both sides have clearly signaled the costs they can absorb and the pain they can inflict. Perhaps the most constructive result of this contest is a hard-won realization, particularly in Washington, that treating one's largest trading partner and supply-chain anchor as an adversary to be easily vanquished is a grave strategic miscalculation.

From another perspective, this mutual step back from the brink is vital for the global economic recovery. In this sense, 2025 may indeed see both nations emerge as winners. After all, when two titans hold the power to destroy the world, simply averting conflict and mutual ruin is the ultimate victory. **BR**

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Spend, Lend, Grow: China's Triple Agency Plan to Rev Up Consumption

By Lan Xinzhen

China's Ministry of Commerce, the People's Bank of China (the central bank) and the National Financial Regulatory Administration have jointly issued a new notice to strengthen coordination between commerce and finance, aiming to more effectively boost consumer spending. The notice outlines 11 policy measures designed to deepen collaboration between commercial and financial systems, enhance financial support in key consumer sectors, and expand cooperation among government bodies, financial institutions and businesses. Crucial initiatives include: encouraging local governments to use policy tools such as financing guarantees and loan interest subsidies to steer credit toward essential consumption areas, accelerating the development of personal consumption loans, and fostering new consumption models, including digital consumption.

Stimulating consumption and expanding domestic demand are key strategies for the Chinese Government to drive economic growth. In 2024, consumption accounted for 44.5 percent of China's GDP growth, making it a primary engine of economic expansion.

In October, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China pledged to foster new growth models—led by domestic demand, driven by consumption and sustained by self-reinforcing momentum. This commitment was reaffirmed at the Central Economic Work Conference on December 10-11, which emphasized the continued focus on strengthening the domestic market.

The recent policy notice aims to guide local authorities and financial institutions in enhancing coordination and implementing targeted measures. By closely aligning improvements in people's wellbeing with consumption promotion, the initiative seeks to build stronger synergies in boosting domestic demand.

A defining feature of the new notice is

its focus on breaking down barriers between commercial and financial policies. By establishing inter-departmental coordination mechanisms, it directly addresses the disconnect between consumer demand and available financial support. This enables more precise assistance for key sectors such as automobiles, home appliances, food and beverage, as well as emerging forms of consumption like e-commerce.

Through targeted financial support, including lowering consumption thresholds, optimizing credit services, reducing interest rates and innovating payment methods, the policy aims to alleviate financial burdens on consumers and stabilize market expectations. This sends a clear, confidence-boosting signal during a pivotal phase of economic recovery.

More broadly, this intensified commerce-finance collaboration suggests a strategic shift: China is beginning to steer financial resources appropriately from the investment side toward the consumption side. Fostering a more self-sustaining, consumption-driven growth model is likely to become a major focus of financial policy in the coming period.

Boosting consumption through financial methods will also mobilize existing funds, and its effect has already been reflected in the trade-in policy of old consumer goods. In the first 11 months of this year, this policy boosted sales of related products by more than 2.5 trillion yuan ($353 billion).

The policy measures to encourage consumption mainly focus on the domestic economic circulation, but will also directly influence the international economy. The notice proposes to enhance the connection between financial institutions and key enterprises that integrate domestic and foreign trade, provide domestic and overseas transaction matching services and improve cross-border supply chain financing models, so as to support more enterprises to integrate domestic and foreign trade and support more high-quality foreign trade products to enter the domestic market.

The notice also proposes promoting inbound consumption and continuously enhancing payment convenience for inbound travelers. This will attract more overseas consumers to spend in China, promote inbound tourism and related service industries, thereby strengthening the connection between China and the global consumer market. In addition, through expanding domestic demand and boosting consumption, China can consolidate its position as a globally important consumer market, which will provide a broader space for other countries to export their products and services, and support the recovery of global trade. **BR**

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Bridging Waters, Building Futures

The River Dialogue connects Shanghai and New York City in a bid to anchor international cooperation in modern urban hearts By Zhao Wei

"The Huangpu River and the Hudson River are not only geographical landmarks; they are living witnesses to the evolution of two remarkable global metropolises," said Siddharth Chatterjee, the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator in China. "Their transformation from industrial arteries into vibrant cultural, ecological and economic hubs reflects cities' ability to reinvent themselves."

His words, delivered via video link on December 15 in Shanghai, set the tone for the second A River Dialogue between Shanghai and New York, an event that used rivers as metaphor and cities as actors to explore how global metropolises and international organizations can work together at a time of profound global change.

Where rivers meet governance

Held at Shanghai's historic Jinjiang Hotel, the site where the 1972 China-U.S. Joint Communiqué, a document that signaled the beginning of the normalization of relations between the two countries, was signed, the dialogue brought together representatives from UN agencies, scholars, government officials and business leaders. Co-hosted by the Shanghai Public Relations Association, the Shanghai Institute of American Studies and the Shanghai UN Research Association, the event carried both symbolic and practical weight given it occurred as 2025 observes the 80th anniversary of the UN and the end of World War II, moments that reshaped the modern multilateral system.

Launched in 2024 and named after the Huangpu River in Shanghai and the Hudson River in New York, the River Dialogue began as a forum on trade, culture and economic ties between the two sides. This year, its focus shifted decisively toward the interaction between global cities and international organizations, reflecting a growing recognition that cities are increasingly central nodes in global governance.

Sha Hailin, President of the Shanghai Public Relations Association, argued in his opening remarks that international organizations are becoming more important as globalization faces headwinds, technological change accelerates and climate challenges intensify. International organizations in Shanghai, he said, bring global standards and perspectives, while the city provides a high-quality service environment and market opportunities in return—a relationship of mutual reinforcement rather than one-way hosting.

Several speakers emphasized that the rise of cities as global governance actors is not accidental. Yu Hongjun, former Vice Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and a former ambassador, noted that while Shanghai and New York differ markedly in history and culture—both occupy strategic positions in a globalized world. From that perspective, expanding city-to-city cooperation is not a symbolic gesture but a practical necessity for addressing shared challenges.

Chen Jing, President of the Shanghai People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, echoed this view in a video address, describing Shanghai's ambition to become a globally influential modern metropolis and its desire to learn from international city experience, including that of New York. Rivers, in this framing, are not merely natural features but conduits of exchange, historically, economically and culturally.

Chatterjee placed this discussion squarely within the UN's broader agenda. Cities, he said, are where multilateralism becomes concrete. They are centers of economic opportunity, creativity and diversity,

Sha Hailin, President of the Shanghai Public Relations Association delivers an opening address at the second A River Dialogue between Shanghai and New York in Shanghai on December 15

but also on the front lines of climate impacts, demographic change, and inequality. How cities collaborate with each other and with international organizations will shape progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a universal call to action adopted by all UN member states in 2015 to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all people by 2030.

"Without water security, no city can achieve sustainable development," Chatterjee said, noting that nearly 90 percent of recorded global disasters over the past decade have been water-related. In that sense, the river metaphor is more than poetic: It reflects the material challenges that cities must collectively manage, he added, quoting UN Secretary General António Guterres: "We must move from promises to action, from hope to results."

Shanghai's evolving ecosystem

One recurring theme throughout the dialogue was Shanghai's transformation into a hub for international organizations. Xu Xin, Deputy District Mayor of Shanghai's Pudong New Area, outlined concrete progress. Pudong currently hosts one intergovernmental organization, the New Development Bank, and 48 non-governmental international organizations, supported by targeted policies and the establishment of the Qiantan International Economic Organization Cluster.

Since 2024, Pudong has become home to seven international scientific organizations, including the International Society for Pharmaceutical Engineering, the American College of Cardiology and the Association for Materials Protection and Performance. These newly established presences now represent 83.3 percent of all international scientific organizations in Shanghai, making Pudong the city's most concentrated hub for global scientific collaboration. As Xu noted, the goal is not merely to boost numbers, but to strategically align these organizations with key local industries, such as integrated circuits, biomedicine, and AI, to drive innovation and development.

ZHANG WEI

This institutional ecosystem, several speakers suggested, allows global norms to be tested and localized. Ying Sheng, Country Manager of the UN-Habitat China Office, pointed to long-standing cooperation between Shanghai and UN-Habitat, including the establishment of World Cities Day and the development of global sustainability awards and assessment frameworks linked to Shanghai. Platforms like the River Dialogue, he said, can help Shanghai and New York explore new models of city-international organization collaboration.

Liu Meng, head of the China office of the UN Global Compact, described how the organization has supported Shanghai's deeper participation in global governance through policy and standards alignment, particularly in environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices. From corporate training to accelerator programs, these initiatives, she argued, demonstrate how international organizations can work with cities to translate global principles into operational practices.

Universities have also emerged as connectors between cities and international organizations. Jeffrey S. Lehman, Executive Vice Chancellor of New York University Shanghai, presented a university-led initiative aligned with the World Health Organization's Decade of Healthy Aging (2021-30). The project compares age-friendly urban environments in Shanghai and New York, seeking to translate research findings into actionable policy recommendations.

"The Dual-City Project opens up the possibility of designing a hybrid health intervention model that could combine the strengths of both Shanghai and New York," Lehman said, describing it as a practical example of how two river cities can advance the goals of a UN initiative.

The contrast he outlined was instructive rather than competitive: Shanghai's government-led approach offers consistency and coverage, while New York's multi-stakeholder, market-driven model encourages innovation and personalization. Studying both, Lehman argued, could generate insights relevant not only to the two cities but also to aging societies worldwide.

Lessons and beyond

International perspectives further enriched the discussion.

Hans d'Orville, former Assistant Director General for Strategic Planning of UNESCO, of- ►►

XINHUA

Tourists take pictures by the Huangpu River in Shanghai in August 2024

fered a more institutional lens, explaining why UNESCO chose Shanghai as the site for new education and STEM-related centers. Hosting an international organization, he emphasized, is only the first step; long-term value depends on governance structures, sustained activity, and the ability to convene global expertise.

Beyond policy and institutions, several speakers highlighted the human dimension of city-to-city and city-to-organization cooperation. Michael Rosenthal, a New York-born business executive who has lived in Shanghai for more than two decades, spoke of the deep historical and cultural ties between the two cities, from early trade links to Shanghai's role as a refuge for Jewish refugees during World War II.

International organizations, Rosenthal argued, are uniquely positioned to sustain cooperation even when national-level relations face difficulties. They create spaces for shared standards, long-term trust and practical experimentation in climate action, public health, digital governance and cultural exchange.

Xu Bu, a member of the UN Secretary General's High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism and former head of the China Institute of International Studies, brought the discussion back to first principles in his closing remarks. People-to-people exchange and city-to-city engagement, he said, are becoming increasingly important in a fragmented world. For Shanghai, strengthening institutions, supportive policies, and talent attraction will be essential as it continues its bid to become a hub for international organizations.

If rivers symbolize continuity, then the River Dialogue seeks to turn conversation into current, something that moves, connects and reshapes landscapes over time. By placing Shanghai and New York within a broader multilateral framework, the second edition of the dialogue underscored a central message: global governance is increasingly practiced in cities, tested in neighborhoods, and sustained through networks that link the local to the global.

The Huangpu and the Hudson are not just witnesses to urban history; they are reminders that flows—of water, people, ideas and institutions—shape the future. And when cities learn to navigate those flows together, they can become powerful engines of multilateral cooperation in an uncertain world. **BR**

(*Reporting from Shanghai*)

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中国外文局美洲传播中心（北京周报社）

左权

DISCOVER ZUOQUAN

A summer resort in the Taihang Mountains

A revolutionary tradition

A thriving economy

A view of Zuoquan Lake

Paths to Prosperity

Field-tested strategies for poverty alleviation By Ji Jing

Pengshui Miao and Tujia Autonomous County in Chongqing Municipality is located within the South China Karst, a vast area of mountains and geological formations covering much of southwest China. Sweet potatoes, potatoes and corn are better suited to Pengshui's terrain and climate than other starch crops, and its innovative approach to the cultivation and processing of sweet potatoes received international recognition as means to alleviate poverty this month.

Established in 2018, the Global Solicitation on Best Poverty Reduction Practices is jointly organized by the International Poverty Reduction Center in China, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme and the China Internet Information Center. With the aim of inspiring individuals and organizations to share case studies as reference materials for global poverty alleviation work, the initiative announces a list of winners at the International Seminar on Global Poverty Reduction Partnerships.

This year's seminar, held on December 10 in Beijing, announced the results of the sixth call for submissions, which was made in October 2024 and garnered 840 submissions from 40 countries and regions. Themed Strengthening Partnerships to Address Poverty Reduction Challenges, the event aimed to explore collaborative approaches for advancing global poverty alleviation and brought together nearly 200 participants from 17 countries and seven international organizations.

One hundred and eight cases were selected for recommendation. The evaluation prioritized the sustainability and replicability of the poverty reduction models, the practical operability of the technologies, and the inclusiveness shown toward vulnerable populations.

At the seminar, Gao Anming, Editor in Chief of China International Communications Group (CICG), proposed jointly establishing an open and inclusive platform for sharing knowledge on poverty reduction that might encourage more countries and institutions to share best practices globally. CICG has been facilitating the international sharing of China's poverty reduction and development experiences for more than 70 years through programs, events and publications including *Beijing Review*.

In a prerecorded message, FAO representative to China Carlos Aldeco said the majority of the world's extremely poor still reside in rural areas and their livelihoods heavily depend on agriculture and other aspects of the rural economies. "The message is clear: Ending poverty requires transforming agrifood systems to ensure better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life for all, leaving no one behind," Aldeco said. "When investments in agriculture are combined with multisectoral approaches—creating jobs, fostering economic diversification, and investing in people—pro-poor rural growth can flourish, helping communities break free from poverty and hunger."

The seminar reached the consensus that strengthening international poverty reduction partnerships is paramount when confronting global poverty challenges. All stakeholders should deepen the sharing of successful experiences, innovate cooperation models, and jointly propel global poverty reduction forward, thereby contributing to the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A testament to transformation

COURTESY PHOTO

Participants at the 2025 International Seminar on Global Poverty Reduction Partnerships in Beijing on December 10

VCG

A visitor experiences a simulation of China's high-speed rail driving system at the Djibouti Luban Workshop exhibition booth at the inaugural World Vocational and Technical Education Development Conference in Tianjin Municipality on August 20, 2022

This year, Li Guoxu, a sweet potato farmer in Ping'an Town of Pengshui, produced over 300 tons of sweet potatoes on her 9-hectare farm. Approximately 220 tons of these were processed into starch, generating a net income exceeding 200,000 yuan ($28,391).

"When I was young, our main diet was sweet potatoes, potatoes and corn. If we are tired of one, we switched to another. It was always these same few things," Li told *Guangming Daily* newspaper. "Who would have imagined we could actually build a good life thanks to the sweet potato?"

Transforming sweet potatoes into a "source of prosperity" demanded rigorous effort in both cultivation and processing.

This scientific backbone is being provided by researchers like Fu Yufan, a sweet potato research professor at the Southwest University's School of Life Sciences. His team recently conducted on-site evaluations of this year's trial varieties, assessing yields and starch levels, as well as carotenes and anthocyanins, which are pigments and antioxidants. "We have tried over 400 varieties in Pengshui and have successfully selected those with high yields, high starch extraction rates, and strong economic returns for widespread promotion," Fu told *Guangming Daily*.

The scale of industrialization is increasing. The county has established over 50 large-scale growing bases and built 42 production lines for processing. With more than 10 types of deep-processed sweet potato products now available, the total output value of the entire sweet potato industry chain exceeds 2 billion yuan ($284 million).

E-commerce has served as the primary link connecting Pengshui's harvest to the wider market. By cultivating over 2,500 e-commerce entities and selling sweet potato products via livestreaming, the county has effectively dismantled the traditional agricultural dilemma where "good products struggled to leave the village, and fair prices were hard to achieve."

A case in point

China Railway Construction Group Co. Ltd. (CRCC) has been highly effective in helping address the critical lack of rail infrastructure and trained technical personnel across Africa. Its capacity-building efforts to assist in poverty alleviation have also made the list of award-winning case studies this year.

In Nigeria, where the railway system was aging and the local education system was not meeting the needs of the modern transportation industry, CRCC began construction of the Federal University of Transportation in Daura Town, Katsina State, in 2021. It is the first specialized university of its kind in Africa and opened in May 2024. The university is now capable of training 500 transportation and railway engineering professionals annually, filling knowledge and technical skill gaps.

Further bolstering this local development is CRCC's joint training model, "Study in China, Return Home for Service," implemented in collaboration with Central South University in Changsha, Hunan Province, and Chang'an University in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. This program has cultivated over 200 Nigerian and Ethiopian graduates, who now form the technical backbone for major infrastructure operations, notably the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, Africa's first cross-border electrified railway built by Chinese companies. The railway connects Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa and the Port of Djibouti.

Embodying the principle that teaching people to fish is more sustainable than giving them a fish, CRCC is deeply involved in vocational education through the Luban Workshops. Named after the ancient Chinese carpenter Lu Ban, this international cooperative project shares China's vocational skills and culture globally. CRCC helped establish Africa's first Luban Workshop in Djibouti, which offers specializations including railway engineering and logistics.

CRCC has also successfully localized the management of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, training nearly 3,000 local employees in driving, operations and maintenance. Today, local staff independently play all critical technical roles, ensuring long-term operational resilience. **BR**

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Private-Sector Pioneers

Entrepreneurial spirit is propelling new space adventures By Yuan Yuan

The skies over the Gobi Desert were the stage for a pivotal moment in China's space industry on December 3: the launch of the *Zhuque-3*, China's first reusable rocket. Developed by private firm LandSpace, the mission was a milestone that could redefine the country's approach to spaceflight.

After propelling its second stage toward orbit, the rocket's first stage embarked on an audacious return to a landing site over 300 km away—a direct challenge to the traditional "launch and forget" model. The mission aimed to recover and reuse the first stage after its precise journey back to Earth.

A narrow miss

Following ignition and liftoff at the Dongfeng Commercial Space Innovation Pilot Zone in Jiuquan, Gansu Province, the mission proceeded normally at first. Then, approximately 130 seconds into the flight, the rocket's stages separated, with the second stage continuing its journey to complete the orbital insertion, and the first stage igniting its engines to begin the pioneering return journey.

The first stage was equipped with a reaction control system, grid fins and landing legs so that it can return and be recovered and reused later.

At the landing site, many program staff and onlookers were awaiting the stage's arrival. While it appeared in the sky right on schedule, an abnormal burn during the final landing hampered its controlled descent and causing it to crash.

The stage one rocket crashed about 40 meters from the targeted center point and experts noted this proximity indicated that had the final landing ignition performed normally, the stage would likely have achieved its goal.

Meanwhile, the second stage flawlessly accomplished its orbital mission, executing a long 1,400-second coast phase.

Discussing the unsuccessful recovery, the mission's commander, Dai Zheng from LandSpace explained that the landing process required a final landing ignition when it was 3 km above ground—similar to slamming on the brakes. "In our case, that final 'braking maneuver' didn't execute correctly," Dai said.

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The upgraded *Zhuque-2 Y2* carrier rocket lifts off from the Dongfeng commercial space innovation pilot zone on May 17, deploying six satellites into their planned orbit

Despite ongoing public debate about whether to label the maiden flight a success or a failure, for Dai and his team, the orbital success unequivocally deserves celebration. Moreover, he emphasized that this launch is China's first attempt to recover the first stage of an orbital-class launch vehicle.

"The primary objective was always achieving orbit, which demonstrates this rocket's capability to serve satellite clients," Dai told Xinhua News Agency. "Recovery is a crucial means for a rocket company to reduce costs, but for our customers, the essential requirement is that we deliver their payloads—their satellites—to the required operational orbit."

Successful orbital insertion was pivotal for the *Zhuque-3*, and equally vital for China's pressing need to deploy satellite constellations. Back in 2016, recognizing the prospects of commercial space, LandSpace became one of the earliest private rocket enterprises to obtain full industry access qualifications for commercial aerospace.

The successful orbital insertion of the *Zhuque-3* is just one of many recent breakthroughs by China's commercial launch companies.

Last January, the *Gravity-1* rocket, developed by another private firm Orienspace, launched successfully from offshore Haiyang, Shandong Province. It set a global record for lift capacity among solid-propellant rockets at the time

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A mechanical mock-up of the *Hyperbola-3* launch vehicle sits inside the assembly, testing and reuse factory of space firm iSpace in Wenchang, Hainan Province, on October 9

and can carry up to 30 satellites in a single mission.

On March 21, the *Cerces-1* rocket, developed by Galactic Energy, launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu, deploying six satellites for the Yunyao meteorological constellation into sun-synchronous orbit. This mission was its 18th successful launch, bringing its total number of delivered satellites to 77. The *Cerces-1* now holds the top position in China's private aerospace sector for launch frequency, number of satellites deployed, and mission success rate.

Engines for growth

Since the release of the National Medium- and Long-Term Development Plan for Civil Space Infrastructure (2015-25), in 2015, the Central Government explicitly encouraged private capital to enter the aerospace field, for the first time.

In October of that year, a milestone was achieved: the successful launch of the *Jilin-1* satellite constellation, developed by the year-old Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co. Ltd. This event is widely regarded as marking the dawn of China's commercial space era.

In the wake of this policy shift, some entrepreneurs ventured into the emerging sector. Private enterprises like LandSpace were established. In 2018, LandSpace conducted the country's first private-sector launch of an orbital carrier rocket.

Rockets, satellites and launch sites are considered the foundational "big three" components of the commercial space industry. With the commissioning of China's first dedicated Hainan Commercial Space Launch Site in November 2024, the nation's commercial space sector gained more momentum. The site has since achieved a state of routine, high-frequency launch operations.

In 2024, China's commercial space sector got another boost. For the first time, commercial aerospace was officially designated a "new growth engine" in the annual Government Work Report. Major hubs like Beijing and Shanghai rolled out dedicated support policies and action plans, vigorously bolstering the industry. This momentum triggered an influx of investment.

The industry's growth is geographically concentrated. In the Yizhuang area of south Beijing, over 160 aerospace companies are clustered, with firms engaged in rocket development, accounting for 75 percent of the national total. Meanwhile, Haidian District in north Beijing is home to a concentration of companies focused on satellite manufacturing, measurement, control and operations. Together, these two hubs are home to more than 200 major enterprises, representing over half of the country's core research and development (R&D) units in these fields.

Supporting infrastructure is keeping pace. The Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area is building "Beijing Rocket Street," a shared R&D and production base, and has established the Reusable Rocket Technology Innovation Center.

From a regional development perspective, commercial rockets have become a fresh economic growth pole. Beyond Beijing's initiatives, some cities, including Bengbu in Anhui Province, are attracting companies such as Deep Blue Aerospace and Jiuzhou Yunjian, aiming to build an influential commercial aerospace manufacturing base in the Yangtze River Delta region by 2035. In Haiyang, a commercial aerospace industrial ecosystem is taking shape, anchored by a sea launch port and rocket assembly facilities, which are gradually drawing in associated industries.

To date, the number of commercial aerospace enterprises in China has rapidly expanded to over 500, accompanied by a continuous climb in the number of satellites in orbit.

"The next three years will be a golden era for Chinese commercial space," Zhang Changwu, Founder and CEO of LandSpace, told Xinhua. "The maturation of reusable rocket technology will drastically reduce launch costs. Commercial rockets characterized by rapid response times and low costs are set to become the new workhorses for launching medium and small satellites." **BR**

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More Than Medals

The spirit and stories behind China's National Games for Persons with Disabilities

By Zhang Yage

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Dong Yiheng (front right) of Liaoning Province competes in the men's vision-impaired downhill race in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on March 5

Imagine a regular soccer match. Players run, pass and shoot, relying on their vision to see the field, their teammates and the ball. Spectators cheer, coaches shout and the whistle blows—all part of the game's familiar flow.

On the vision-impaired soccer pitch, there is no visual guidance. Players wear blindfolds to ensure an equal degree of vision impairment and navigate by sound, listening for the rattling bells inside the ball and following verbal directions from guides. The crowd remains quiet, respecting the athletes' reliance on hearing. Only when a goal is scored does applause break the silence.

Games like this took place throughout the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) and the Ninth National Special Olympic Games (NSOG), held on December 8-15.

The NGD is the nation's highest-level multi-sport event for individuals with disabilities, and the NSOG encourages mass participation in sports competitions for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Both are typically

held every four years. Hosted across the Greater Bay Area (nine cities in Guangdong Province plus Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions), the 2025 edition was a record-shattering event of staggering scale, with nearly 8,000 athletes from 34 delegations competing in 46 sports, over 30 percent more than at the previous edition. Urumqi hosted the alpine skiing events earlier this year.

"The Paralympic Games serve as a platform for athletes with disabilities to demonstrate their determination and fighting spirit. They also provide a window for society to show its care and support for the cause of persons with disabilities," Chen Xuejun, Deputy Director of the Executive Committee for the Guangdong Competition Zone of both events, told newspaper *Southern Daily*.

Heart of the Games

Beyond the impressive scale, the true heartbeat of the Games resided in moments like those on the soccer pitch, where athletic excellence converges with human resilience.

In the swimming arena, 39-year-old Yang Bozun from Tianjin Municipality, a veteran with five Paralympic appearances, defied time and physical hurdles. After an earlier health scare that required hospitalization, many doubted his return. Yet, he claimed gold in the men's 100-meter breaststroke.

"During a medical check-up in May, my blood pressure was exceptionally high. The doctor had me hospitalized for observation for two weeks," Yang told media in a post-match interview.

After getting his blood pressure under control, Yang resumed training. "Now that I'm older, my physical condition isn't what it used to be. Just being able to compete feels lucky to me. In the past, it was about challenging my records; now, with changes in my physical condition, I need to adjust my strategy and manage my stamina more wisely."

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Liaoning Province's Zhao Pingan (left) sprints alongside his guide runner toward the gold medal in the men's 100m T11 final in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on December 11

"Twenty years ago, when an eye disease robbed me of my sight, I never knew that sports would become my second light. Every race may be my last, and I cherish the opportunity to compete now more than ever," Yang said.

On the soccer pitch, Lin Haonan of the Guangdong team left audiences in awe with his rapid footwork and spatial awareness, scoring a hat-trick in their game on December 10. "We train in a world of darkness, guided only by sound and trust," Lin shared after leading his team to a 7-0 victory. His goal is to shine on the world stage at the 2028 Los Angeles Paralympic Summer Games.

Perhaps no story encapsulates the transformative power of sport more than that of table tennis champion Xue Juan, who earned the medal with her partner Yang Zhonghui at the women's TT3 doubles final on December 9. At 16, she was a shy girl from a rural village, earning a basic living by taking on the odd job and doing handicrafts.

Discovered by a coach who saw potential in her long arms, she moved to Beijing with one aim: to not be a burden to her family. Through years of grueling practice, often tumbling from her wheelchair while lunging for shots, she persevered. Today, she has a stable and promising career.

"Table tennis gave me a second life," she said. "It pulled me out of my small, closed world and showed me my own value."

For many persons with disabilities, participating in sports brings not only honor but also fosters a healthy and positive lifestyle, offering lifelong benefits.

Gao Yanming, a table tennis player from the Chongqing Municipality team, is 61—a rare senior among the athletes. Yet, retirement is not at all on his mind.

"Table tennis has helped me tremendously. Whether in terms of physical rehabilitation or other aspects, I have gained so much from it. It has become an essential part of my life. Whether I compete in the future or not, I will never put down the paddle," Gao told newspaper *Guangming Daily*.

"At first, I needed assistance with everything. Now, I can fully take care of myself and have even learned to drive. For this competition, I drove here all the way from Liaoning Province (in northeast China) by myself," Gao said. "Many people who see me remark on how well I look. All of this stems from my daily table tennis training. I hope to serve as an ▶▶

Tianjin teammates and twin brothers Li Haitao (left) and Li Haibo celebrate after the men's 100m backstroke S15 final in Shenzhen of Guangdong on December 10. They claimed gold and silver, respectively, in the race

Shanghai's Pan Nianshuo awaits the start in the men's 400m T64 final in Guangzhou on December 12

example, inspiring more persons with disabilities to believe that through sports rehabilitation, they can achieve good health and a positive state of being."

Support services

To enhance the quality of support services, the Guangdong competition zone assembled a team of 15,000 event volunteers. These volunteers came from nine host cities across the province and 63 universities.

Additionally, the Guangdong committee selected 2,810 experienced and outstanding volunteers from those who had already served at the 15th National Games, the country's highest-level and largest national multi-sport event, held in the Greater Bay Area from November 9 to 21. These veteran volunteers continued their service for the Paralympics.

"Considering the specific characteristics of the Paralympic events, we developed a comprehensive, professional and practical training system. This system focuses on strengthening skills in sign language communication, wheelchair assistance and guiding athletes with visual impairments, ensuring volunteers provide meticulous care and service with professional expertise," Chen added.

The Games' organizing committee highlighted "tech-for-accessibility" as a core theme for this year's edition of the Games. Smart, AI-assisted prosthetics and accessibility tools have been developed to help athletes overcome their disabilities.

"Technology-assisted support for persons with disabilities was a highlight of the Games. Leveraging the opportunity presented by hosting the Games, efforts have been made to promote the upgrading of the assistive devices industry toward new materials, the integration of smart tech and digitalization," Chen said.

Key innovations included AI smart glasses and robotic guide dogs that provided real-time audio navigation for visually impaired athletes, while integrated service platforms utilized AI for instant sign language translation. Moreover, AI-driven soft exoskeletons offered athletes personalized post-game recovery programs, and AI companion robots offered psychological support. These applications collectively demonstrated a commitment to building a more accessible and inclusive future through technology.

Policy empowerment

The remarkable success of China's athletes with disabilities reflects a foundational national effort to advance disability rights, accessibility and social inclusion for all.

As volunteer teams provide support services for athletes at the Games, in daily life, safeguards for persons with disabilities have been implemented across many areas, including education, social welfare, culture, healthcare, sports and assistive technology.

At the State Council Information Office's press conference on high-quality completion of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), held on November 22, officials from the China Disabled Persons' Federation introduced the latest achievements in the development of undertakings for

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Athletes gather to cut a birthday cake during a special collective birthday party held for competitors at a Guangzhou venue of the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) on December 10

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Basketball player Chen Meier (third left) of the Guangdong provincial team delivers a pass during a match in Guangzhou on December 12, helping her team win the women's wheelchair basketball quarterfinals of the 2025 NGD

persons with disabilities.

Employment serves as a pivotal pathway for persons with disabilities to integrate equally into society and realize their personal value. Li Dongmei, Vice Chairperson and Executive Vice President of the federation, said that over the recent five years, both the scale and quality of employment for persons with disabilities in China have improved pointedly. Nationwide, the number of persons with disabilities gaining new employment has remained stable at over 400,000 annually, and a cumulative total of 2.31 million persons with disabilities have gained new employment during this five-year period. The employment rate for persons with disabilities has increased by nearly 5 percentage points during this period.

"Culture and sports serve as vital means to enrich the spiritual and cultural lives of persons with disabilities and to promote their equal participation in social life. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, China's persons with disabilities have made outstanding achievements in major international competitions, with the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics presenting a leap forward in winter sports development," Li said.

Brand events such as the National Special Olympics Day, Disability Fitness Week and the Winter Sports Season for Persons with Disabilities have made rehabilitation and fitness sports more accessible to persons with disabilities.

As part of the annual National Disability Culture Week, many public cultural venues are open to persons with disabilities free of charge, supported by dedicated accessibility services.

"To meet the aspiration of persons with disabilities for better quality of life, we must ensure both material prosperity and intellectual enrichment," Zhou Changkui, Executive President of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, said at the press release. "During the upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, we will carry out mass cultural and sports activities for persons with disabilities, providing more high-quality services and products. While developing competitive sports, greater emphasis will be placed on the growth of mass sports, encouraging more persons with disabilities to step out of their homes for recreation and fitness." **BR**

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Tea, Technology and Transformation

One remote county's local solutions to universal challenges By Ma Xiaowen

Jimusar is a county in Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, where winter temperatures often plunge to minus 25 degrees Celsius and the Tianshan Mountains command the horizon. Local officials and residents in the county have been working together to create localized solutions to universal challenges.

Their approaches are strengthening community ties, improving rural healthcare and fostering sustainable growth in a resource-rich region. What makes Jimusar's approaches notable is not only the solutions themselves but the way they have emerged from practical, locally adapted initiatives that blend tradition with technology to improve everyday life.

A potent remedy

While winter winds sweep across northwest China, warmth and conversation fill the community center on Wenming Road in Jimusar's urban area. People often cluster around with cups of steaming milk tea, talking, laughing, and also discussing neighborhood issues. This frequent scene is brought about thanks to the Neighborhood Milk Tea Chats initiative.

The Wenming Road neighborhood comprises both old residential complexes and standalone buildings, housing over 7,000 people. In the past, people barely knew their next-door neighbors, let alone the others in their buildings. But now, the Neighborhood Milk Tea Chats have reshaped how this community administers itself.

"The rule (at the chats) is simple," said Zhang Jun, director of the community, pouring tea for newcomers. "Everyone speaks, everyone listens and we solve problems together."

What began as an experiment in late 2023 has become a model of grassroots democracy, tackling issues from misplaced parcels to creating shared spaces for the elderly.

The process is practical and swift. When Markfulla Vakas raised concerns about inadequate shade and unclear addresses, the community secured funding and within 10 days, built a 20-meter shaded walkway and installed new address plates. "The speed surprised everyone," Vakas recalled.

The milk tea gatherings have also brought neighbors closer. Feng Xiaoyan and Ainur Smay, who live opposite each other in the same building, became "sisters" thanks to these get-togethers.

"We'd been neighbors for seven or eight years, but we'd never met until the milk tea gatherings," Feng smiled.

Ainur added: "During the Chinese New Year, I make fried *sanzi* (twisted dough sticks), *youguo* (fried pastries) and butter cakes for her. When I cook *polo* (Uygur rice pilaf) or dumplings, I either invite her over or send some to her."

These gatherings have evolved into multipurpose forums—bonds are built and wisdom is shared. In an age of social fragmentation, Jimusar has brewed a potent remedy: genuine conversation, served with hospitality.

The model has since spread across the county, proving that effective local governance can be as simple as chairs arranged in a circle and shared tea. According to Zhang, Jimusar has held over 2,000 Neighborhood Milk Tea Chats, and about 25,000 people have participated so far.

Dual economic engine

Beneath Jimusar's frosty surface lie vast shale oil reserves. In the past, extracting this oil was unfeasible due to the complex geology of the region, likened to "squeezing oil from a stone." Today, technology has made extraction viable and Jimusar is now at the heart of China's first national continental shale oil demonstration zone.

"The breakthrough came from intelligent extraction," explained Wu Bin, who heads the shale oil central station in the Jiqing Oilfield Operation Area.

Wu told *Beijing Review* that shale oil extraction is far more challenging than conventional crude oil production. Through PetroChina's efforts, the Jimusar Shale Oil Demonstration Zone has become China's pacesetter in unconventional oil development, establishing a new "intelligent regulation plus low-carbon oil recovery" model.

The zone integrates subsurface oil extraction with surface tourism, meeting green, smart and economic benchmarks. Notably, its annual output achieved a "Jimusar Leap"—surging from 0.5 million tons in 2022 to over 1 million tons in 2024—with a 2025 target of exceeding 1.7 million tons.

"Currently, we've shortened horizontal well drilling cycles from 90 to 31 days, and our platform-based 3D deployment model cuts land use by over 50 percent," Zheng Aimin, foreman of Shale Oil Operation Team 1, told *Beijing Review*. The

MA XIAOWEN

A facility in the Jimusar Shale Oil Demonstration Zone, China's first national-level lacustrine shale oil demonstration zone, on November 25

Internet of Things system enables unmanned patrols, rodless pumping eliminates spills and leaks, and fracturing fluid recycling saves over 800,000 cubic meters of water yearly—achieving greener shale oil development.

While oil extraction advances underground, an agricultural treasure thrives above ground. Farmers in the southern township of Dayou are growing morels, highly prized delicate spring mushrooms known as the "king of fungi" for their flavor and nutritional value. Dayou, with its distinctive microclimate, provides a favorable environment for growing morels.

"From harvest to plate, it takes about 15 days," said farmer-entrepreneur Wu Wei, walking through once idle greenhouses now alive with growth. Morels sell for up to 400 yuan ($56.58) per kg in premium urban markets, and its cultivation has revived over 800 abandoned greenhouses in the county and created seasonal jobs for hundreds.

While coordination among farmers, cooperatives and enterprises is key to ramping up production, partnership with experts in Xiamen, Fujian Province in southeast China, has boosted processing and storage capacity. Together, they are growing not just morels but a regional brand.

Redefined rural living

Another striking change in Jimusar is its redefinition of rural living. Xiaofenzi used to be an impoverished hamlet due to its remoteness. It used to take two hours to reach it by winding mountain road from Jimusar's county seat. But today, it is a vibrant Painters' Village, where artists from across the country come to paint, working against the stunning backdrop of the Tianshan Mountains.

"It started when the first artist decided to stay," recalled Qi Jirong, whose family now runs a thriving guesthouse. "We began to see our home as they did—not just as poor mountains, but as inspiration."

Investments in studios and infrastructure, aided by cross-provincial partnerships with Xiamen, attracted more artists, and their presence drew tourists, then entrepreneurs, then further investment.

In 2024, this small village welcomed 300,000 visitors, generating over 8 million yuan ($1.13 million) in tourism revenue.

Jimusar is also tackling a fundamental rural challenge: access to healthcare. For isolated villages, seeing a doctor once meant hours of travel—until the Walking Hospital arrived.

The Walking Hospital project, implemented in 2022, connects villagers with health experts providing free services, according to Xie Yutao, Executive President of the Walking Hospital.

The project provides registration slots at renowned hospitals in Beijing, Shanghai and other places, and also has more than 80 local experts on its panel. Through the Walking Hospital Health 180 service platform, residents can make appointments with doctors via Weixin, the version of social media platform WeChat used within China. They describe their symptoms and local doctors respond to their request within 10 minutes.

If no local doctor responds to a particular request, an alarm is triggered, and the operation center manually assigns orders based on location. Users can also book medical appointments on behalf of those without mobile phones, such as seniors and children.

When visiting patient homes in person, local doctors carry consultation assistance kits, which are equipped to provide 34 routine tests, including electrocardiograms, ultrasounds, and blood and urine tests. The test data can be shared in real time through the platform. When necessary, medical experts, even those in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, can directly view the uploaded electronic images and reports, which has greatly improved diagnostic efficiency.

Xu Xiu, the person in charge of the Health Cabin in the Wenming Road community, said that the test kits can check multiple parameters, including blood pressure, blood glucose and uric acid content, and create personal health records including patients' allergy information and disease history. All tests are free of charge.

The Walking Hospital project has benefited many local residents, completing over 9,000 medical calls and making nearly 7,000 appointments with experts at remote clinics.

Pragmatism as policy

Jimusar's successes have been made through adaptations to local conditions, leveraging of appropriate technologies, and focusing on making tangible improvements to people's everyday wellbeing.

At a time when many rural communities in the world confront depopulation and declining services, Jimusar shows how these challenges can be met with context-sensitive solutions that respect local wisdom while embracing innovation. **BR**

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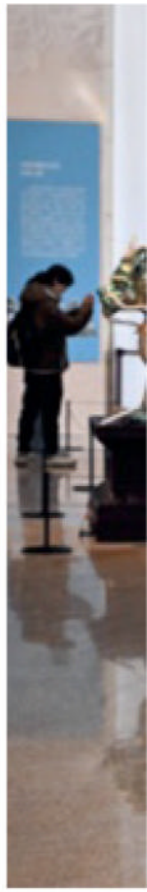

A Shell-ebration!

A shell carving exhibition was held at the Chinese Traditional Culture Museum in Beijing on November 5-19, showing works from artists of different ages and from different regions of China.

Shell carving originates in China's coastal and riverine regions. Cities such as Dalian in northeast China's Liaoning Province, Xiantao in Hubei Province in central China and Beihai in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southwest China all boast long histories of shell carving. This art form traces its roots to the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-256 B.C.) and reached its apex during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911).

Shell carving blends several traditional Chinese arts, including painting, calligraphy and sculpture, to create different styles, such as three-dimensional shell carving, micro-carving and piled carving. Artisans process natural shells through dozens of stages, preserving inherent colors, textures and luster while infusing each piece with a unique aesthetic vision. **BR**

(Text and photos by Wei Yao)

1. A dragon boat decorated with a model of the Yellow Crane Tower, created by artist Lu Guangrong. The Yellow Crane Tower is a famous historical and cultural landmark in Wuhan, Hubei Province

2. A work titled *Suanni*—a mythical lion-like beast in Chinese tradition—jointly created by Jin Ashan and Jin Li

3. A piece created by artist He Yifu reveals how shells are turned into shell carving works

4. *Plum Blossom,* jointly created by artists Jin Ashan and Han Jianxin

5. Artworks based on Chinese flower-and-bird paintings

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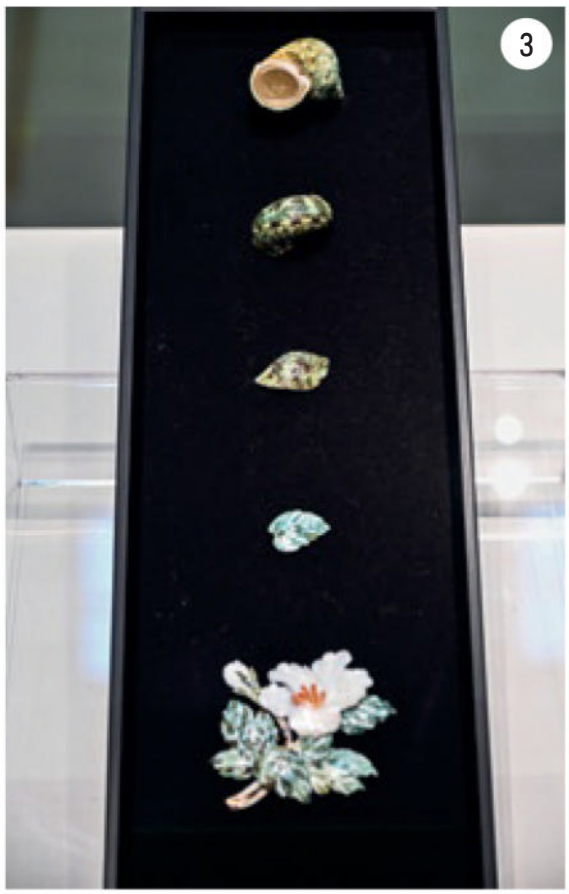
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Trustworthy or Toxic? The Reason China Is Banning Mercury Thermometers

China will enact a comprehensive ban on the production of mercury thermometers and blood pressure monitors (sphygmomanometers) starting January 1, 2026. This move phases out two familiar, low-cost staples found in household medicine cabinets across the country.

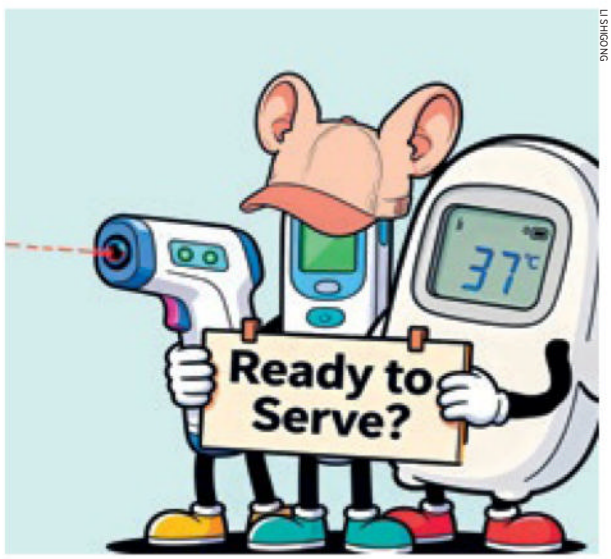
The reasons for the ban are unequivocal: Mercury is a potent, persistent poison. Even at low levels, long-term exposure poses serious health risks, and environmental contamination from broken devices is a major concern. Despite these dangers, mercury thermometers have endured due to their perceived accuracy, simplicity and low cost. Their dependable, no-battery-required design has made them a hard habit to break.

This leaves consumers with a pressing question: As they say goodbye to a classic, are modern electronic thermometers dependable enough to earn their trust?

Luo Yi (Rednet.cn): The mercury thermometer's low price comes at a staggering ecological cost. While it may sell for just a few yuan (roughly under $1), that reflects only its basic manufacturing expense. The true cost reveals itself across the device's life cycle—and it is astonishingly high.

A single thermometer contains 1 to 2 grams of mercury. If broken and improperly handled, that mercury becomes a persistent hazard: It vaporizes into the air, seeps into soil and waterways, and accumulates in living organisms. The resulting environmental cleanup and potential long-term healthcare costs can be hundreds, even thousands, of times greater than the thermometer's retail price. For decades, this ecological debt remained hidden. The new production ban finally halts the unsustainable trade-off of environmental safety for cheap convenience.

Public reluctance to switch stems from a deeper trust gap: the visible versus the unseen.



LI SHIGONG

The appeal of the mercury thermometer lies in its tangible, intuitive operation. Watching the silvery column expand and contract with body heat offers a sense of direct, physical reassurance.

Electronic thermometers, by contrast, feel abstract. They convert heat into digital readings through sensors and algorithms—a process that remains invisible to the user. For those accustomed to the idea that "seeing is believing," this unseen logic can feel unsettling.

Yet this trust in visibility is misleading. Mercury thermometers are far from foolproof. Their readings depend heavily on the user's eyesight and viewing angle, leaving wide room for human error. More critically, their design traps a potent neurotoxin inside a fragile glass casing, creating a constant, latent risk in every household.

A qualified electronic thermometer, empowered by consistent algorithmic processing, delivers precision that meets medical standards while entirely eliminating the risk of heavy-metal exposure.

Therefore, banning mercury thermometers is more than a product update—it is a fundamental shift in risk management. It asks us to exchange comforting intuition for reliable, safer accuracy.

Wang Shichuan (Chengdu.cn): It's time to say goodbye to mercury thermometers, but to ensure public acceptance, supportive measures must accompany the ban.

First, will existing thermometers be recalled? While the state is not banning household use outright, proper disposal remains essential. Most people don't know how to handle old thermometers, and if they are thrown out with regular trash, they risk causing pollution. To prevent this, dedicated reclaim stations should be set up in pharmacies and community centers, making safe disposal easy and accessible. Public awareness campaigns are also mandatory to inform households about the dangers of keeping mercury devices at home.

Second, are suitable substitutes available? Alternatives already exist, including electronic thermometers, infrared ear thermometers and mercury-free liquid thermometers that use Galinstan—a non-toxic, safe alloy. However, price and availability remain barriers. While electronic models are becoming more affordable, mercury-free Galinstan thermometers are still produced in low volumes and are not yet widely stocked in pharmacies, largely because demand remains tied to the soon-to-be-phased-out mercury versions.

For the transition to succeed, two things are needed: convenient, safe disposal systems for existing mercury thermometers; and accessible, affordable alternatives that people can trust.

Only with clear guidance and reliable options will the public move confidently away from a familiar but dangerous product. **BR**

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